

The Milieu and Context of the Wooing Group

Susannah M. Chewning

University of Wales Press

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RELIGION AND CULTURE IN THE MIDDLE AGES

The Milieu and Context of the Wooing Group

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The Milieu and Context of the Wooing Group

Edited by

SUSANNAH MARY CHEWNING



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SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages aims to explore the interface between medieval religion and culture, with as broad an understanding of those terms as possible. It puts to the forefront studies which engage with works that significantly contributed to the shaping of medieval culture. However, it also gives attention to studies dealing with works that reflect and highlight aspects of medieval culture that have been neglected in the past by scholars of the medieval disciplines. For example, devotional works and the practice they infer illuminate our understanding of the medieval subject and its culture in remarkable ways, while studies of the material space designed and inhabited by medieval subjects yield new evidence on the period and the people who shaped it and lived in it. In the larger field of religion and culture, we also want to explore further the roles played by women as authors, readers and owners of books, thereby defining them more precisely as actors in the cultural field. The series as a whole investigates the European Middle Ages, from c.500 to c.1500. Our aim is to explore medieval religion and culture with the tools belonging to such disciplines as, among others, art history, philosophy, theology, history, musicology, the history of medicine, and literature. In particular, we would like to promote interdisciplinary studies, as we believe strongly that our modern understanding of the term applies fascinatingly well to a cultural period marked by a less tight confinement and categorization of its disciplines than the modern period. However, our only criterion is academic excellence, with the belief that the use of a large diversity of critical tools and theoretical approaches enables a deeper understanding of medieval culture. We want the series to reflect this diversity, as we believe that, as a collection of outstanding contributions, it offers a more subtle representation of a period that is marked by paradoxes and contradictions and which necessarily reflects diversity and difference, however difficult it may sometimes have proved for medieval culture to accept these notions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Wooing Group and the texts most closely associated with it, *Ancrene Wisse* and the Katherine Group, comprise a community of works of early Middle English that have often been viewed outside of their cultural and linguistic context or as anomalous and beyond any real tradition of literature, culture, or even theology in the English Middle Ages. This collection will, I believe, serve to open these works to new readers, new perspectives and interpretations, and new constructions of medieval English theology, the anchoritic tradition, and early Middle English literature. The scholars who have contributed to this collection, many of them recognized experts in their respective disciplines, have brought to light creative and innovative perspectives on these works and their milieu, and for that I would like to begin by giving my thanks to each of them for their careful, thoughtful, and exceptional interpretations and examinations of these works: Jennifer Brown, Sarah Salih, Catherine Innes-Parker, Michelle Sauer, Jeremy Smith, Michael Sargent, Bella Millett, and most especially Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson, whose *Anchoritic Spirituality* (Paulist Press 1991) is the starting point for all scholars who pursue the English Anchoritic tradition. Their presence in this collection is especially important to me, as their scholarship, generosity, and support has made any work I have completed on *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd* possible, and I owe them and all of the contributors my most sincere thanks.

This collection was first suggested as a result of a conversation begun at the first Anchoritic Conference, *Anchorites, Wombs, and Tombs* at Gregynog, Wales, in 2002. The conference, organized by Mari Hughes-Edwards and Liz Herbert McAvoy, predates the formation of the International Anchoritic Society (although it, too, is an outgrowth of the conference) and allowed scholars interested in the anchoritic tradition in England to discuss their ideas and scholarship in a context of others who already knew what the words *anchoritic* and indeed *Wohunge* meant, so that we were able to discuss our work at much greater length and begin to form a network of collaboration and collegiality. I am quite sure many of those of us who attended that conference and the three successive

anchoritic conferences—at Gregynog, Glenstal Abbey in Ireland, and Hiroshima Shudo University in Japan—have been as grateful as I have to be involved in such a community of scholars, but it ought to be said in writing, so I would very much like to thank the organizers of those events, Mari Hughes-Edwards, Colmán O’Clabaigh, Fumiko Yoshikawa, and Liz Herbert McAvoy for their hard work and gracious hospitality during and beyond these events.

Liz McAvoy deserves a special thanks from all of those who study the anchoritic tradition, but most especially from me, both personally and professionally. She has tirelessly organized events, including the anchoritic conferences, such as organizing the International Anchoritic Society sessions at the Leeds International Medieval Congress, organizing events for the IAS as well as for the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship at both the Leeds and Kalamazoo Congresses; she also is a prolific and gifted scholar whose own work has contributed a great deal to anchoritic studies and the study of the figures who participated in the English anchoritic tradition—most notably Christine Carpenter, Julian of Norwich, and Margery Kempe. She is a great friend and has helped me in my work in countless ways, including this project, and I would like to thank her sincerely for her loyalty and support.

Diane Watt and Denis Renevey, the editors of the *Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages* series for the University of Wales Press, have also been extremely supportive and helpful with this project (and my career) from its earliest stages and as I have brought it to its completion, all the while juggling a full-time teaching load, recovering from two serious injuries and dealing with a distance of several thousand miles. I would also like to thank my colleagues in the Department of English at Union County College for their patience and support as my deadlines loomed and other matters sometimes had to be put off temporarily.

Finally, I am indebted to the members and participants, again, of the International Anchoritic Society, those who contributed essays to this volume and those whose work has informed and supported the works of the contributors, including Robert Hasenfratz, Michelle Sauer, Jennifer Brown, Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, Eddie Jones, Liz McAvoy, Robin Gillbank, Catherine Innes-Parker, Jane Chance, Diane Watt, Anne Savage, Vincent Gillespie, Denis Renevey, Cate Gunn, Louise Nelstrop, Johan Bergstrom-Allen, and Karl-Heinz Steinmetz, to whom, collectively, this volume is dedicated.

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NICHOLAS WATSON is Professor of English at Harvard University. He is author of *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority* (Cambridge, 1991) and co-author, editor, and translator of several other books including *Anchoritic Spirituality: 'Ancrene Wisse' and Associated Works* (with Anne Savage, 1991), *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Literary Theory, 1280–1520* (with Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Andrew Taylor and Ruth Evans, 1999), *The Vulgar Tongue: Medieval and Postmedieval Vernacularity* (with Fiona Somerset, 2004), and *Writings of Julian of Norwich: 'A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman' and 'A Revelation of Love'* (with Jacqueline Jenkins, 2006).

Introduction

SUSANNAH MARY CHEWNING

In a review of W. Meredith Thompson's 1958 edition of *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, the anonymous reviewer from the *Times Literary Supplement* describes the edition as possessing a 'disciplined competence and a judicious enthusiasm'.¹ This description amounts to the only fully positive comment about the edition written by this reviewer, one who seems mainly to draw from other reviews rather than to make constructive criticism of her own. Other reviews comment on problems now very well known to readers of the *Wohunge* in Thompson's edition, missed opportunities to cross-reference in the glossary, for example, and the diplomatic nature of the edition, which G. V. Smithers notes is intended for 'those experienced in reading ME MSS ... [and] scholars who cannot lay hands on any sort of reproduction of the MS',² but which, as a result, is more difficult for 'all other classes of readers'.³ Smithers, Phyllis Hodgson, Beatrice White, Elizabeth Salter and the anonymous *TLS* reviewer all reviewed Thompson within about eighteen months of the appearance of the edition, and none of the reviews is particularly surprising, although one major issue is left out of each review, and that is that the appearance of Thompson's edition began a new chapter in early English medieval scholarship which has come to its fruition with the present volume (and with forthcoming new editions of texts within the Wooing Group and its associated works).⁴ Until the EETS volume was published, few scholars knew *De Wohunge of ure Lauerde* or even of its existence, and fewer still knew that there was such a thing as the Wooing Group.⁵ However, once the edition became available, a whole generation of new students and scholars was able to read and discuss these works within the context of *Ancrene Wisse*⁶ and beyond. Besides Thompson, the other names that have made scholarship of the Wooing

Group possible for current scholars are Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson, who in their 1991 edition of what they called *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Related Works*, brought about a revolution in scholarship of the Wooing Group, the Katherine Group and, for many scholars, *Ancrene Wisse* itself, which until then had not been published in a scholarly, affordable paperback edition of any kind. As a result, the majority of scholarship (with some important exceptions) on the Wooing Group has been produced since 1991, a momentous year for me as it was the first year of my own doctoral studies and the year I encountered the English anchoritic works for the first time. Since that time, there have been several books devoted to English anchoritic subjects, including three very useful collections: *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs: Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Marie Hughes-Edwards (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005); *Approaching Medieval English Anchoritic and Mystical Texts*, ed. Dee Dyas, Valerie Edden and Roger Ellis (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005); *Rhetoric of the Anchorhold: Space, Place and Body within Discourses of Enclosure*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008); these will shortly be followed by *Anchoritic Spirituality: Enclosure, Authority, Transcendence*, ed. Susannah Mary Chewning (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming). These collections represent a growing scholarly awareness of the significance of the anchoritic tradition in medieval English theology, literature, archaeology, linguistic studies and cultural studies, and represent only the beginning of what will certainly continue to be a growing scholarly focus on these works, authors and figures and their world.

Scholarship of the Wooing Group⁷ has grown into a very strong and enthusiastic enterprise, with five recent doctoral dissertations devoted to it,⁸ as well as a number of high-profile medieval scholars writing and publishing frequently about these works. Considering the brevity of the works, which in Thompson amount to fewer than forty pages in all, the vast number of scholars and students whose interest has turned to these works is remarkable and is, indeed, a tribute to the editions of 1958 and 1991, as well as to the rise in interest in female subjectivity, gender studies, Early English and anchoritism in general since the late 1980s.⁹ *Ancrene Wisse* has been the subject of a large body of scholarship, beginning with James Morton's 1853 edition and translation¹⁰ and maintaining a steady stream of scholarship throughout the twentieth century (although it, too, did not become as important or frequent a scholarly choice until the last two decades). This volume, then, although devoted to specific works defined as the Wooing Group, represents a response to and participation in the grow-

ing circle of scholars whose focus includes the anchoritic tradition, female authorship and reception of medieval works, and hagiographic works such as those found in associated anchoritic works as well as the lives and works of such figures as Christina of Markyate, Richard Rolle, Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe.

The Wooing Group and its Context

What we now call the Wooing Group is a collection of seven works which are found in five manuscripts. In Thompson there are six works listed: *On Ureisun of Ure Louerde*, *On wel swuðe God Ureisun of God Almihti*, *On Lofsong of Ure Louerde*, *On Lofsong of Ure Lefdi*, *Þe Oreisun of Seinte Marie* and *Þe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*. To this list, for the purposes of this collection and as an accepted addition among scholars of the Wooing Group is added *A Talkyng of the Loue of God*, a fourteenth-century ‘pastiche, of which the first part is paraphrased from the *Ureisun of God Almihti* and the last part from the *Wohunge*’,¹¹ making the total seven works.¹² The texts appear in six manuscripts: MS Lambeth 487, which contains *On Ureisun of Ure Louerde* (an incomplete version of *On wel swuðe God Ureisun of God Almihti*); MS Cotton Nero A.xiv, which contains *On God Ureisun of Ure Lefdi*, *On wel swuðe God Ureisun of God Almihti*, *On Lofsong of Ure Lefdi*, and *On Lofsong of Ure Louerde*; MS Royal 17 A.xxvii, which contains ‘a fragment of the *Lofsong of Ure Lefdi* there called *Þe Oreisun of Seinte Marie*’;¹³ MS Cotton Titus D.xviii, which contains *Þe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*; and MSS Vernon (Bodleian 3938) and Simeon (Brit. Mus. Add. 22283), both of which contain versions of *A Talkyng of the Loue of God*. *Þe Wohunge of ure Lauerd* is the longest work (besides *A Talkyng*) in the Group and thus provides its name. Other works associated with the Wooing Group are, obviously, *Ancrene Wisse*,¹⁴ versions of which appear in three of the manuscripts, and the works known collectively as the Katherine Group,¹⁵ excerpts of which also appear in several of the *Wohunge* manuscripts.

The genre of literature into which the Wooing Group (and the Katherine Group)¹⁶ fit is the English anchoritic tradition, referring to works written by and for anchorites,¹⁷ religious solitaries whose presence in England flourished between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries. Anchorites are hermits whose location is fixed and permanent. This provided a geographical focus for the recluse, but also affected the spiritual and physical life of these people, as well.

By a process of internalization, both the physical martyrdom of the earliest Christian centuries and the search for the desert that had followed in its wake (and which was in itself a substitute for bloody martyrdom) became mental states. What had been actual became symbolic ... the virgin, the martyr, the repentant sinner, the ascetic and would-be mystic, the pilgrim, the soldier – all found a desert retreat as well as a deserved or necessary prison in the anchorite's cell of the Middle Ages.¹⁸

Although other forms of reclusive and solitary life existed throughout Europe in the early medieval period, 'anchoritism evolved into a spatially fixed and physically restricted vocation, whereas the hermit, equally solitary ideologically, was freer to move about ... thus the anchoritic life ... rapidly became imbued with notions of a physically static environment'.¹⁹ The English anchoritic tradition begins, according to all scholarly accounts, with St Guthlac who retreated to rural Lincolnshire in approximately 699, living in a hut in the fens near Croyland (where an abbey was founded in his memory).²⁰ Guthlac wished to emulate the desert fathers but did so in a particularly English location, choosing his indigenous swamps and fens over the biblical desert. As McAvoy and Hughes-Edwards have argued, his reclusion in Lincolnshire represents 'the caves of the desert fathers being transformed both literally and rhetorically into the nascent English anchorhold of much later tradition'.²¹ Two early English female anchoritic figures are Christina of Markyate and Ælfwynn; Ælfwynn is described as an anchorite in Christina's *Vita*, which notes that Christina (born Theodora in about 1095) lived with Ælfwynn for about two years (1115–16). Christina was enclosed as a hermit from about 1116 to 1122, after which, in about 1131, she entered the monastery at St Albans. Ælfwynn is always discussed with respect to her having given shelter to Christina, but her presence as an anchorite (the Latin references to her are *anachoretam* and *inclusa*²²) in the first two decades of the twelfth century support the idea that the practice was fairly popular and that the twelfth-century audience of Christina's *Vita* would have understood what an anchoress (or anchorite) was. Still, whether it is Christina or Ælfwynn who is under discussion, Christina's *Vita* confirms the presence of women living as anchorites by the early twelfth century. Throughout the twelfth century the presence of anchorites grew in England; the next well-known figure is Wulfric of Haselbury who lived alone as a recluse in the wilderness of Somerset for a few years and officially as an anchorite, enclosed at the church in Haselbury Plucknett, where he died in 1154. Both Christina (and perhaps Ælfwynn) and Wulfric reinforce the data of the growing number of anchoritic cells and anchorites in England in the twelfth century, so the

need for texts such as *Ancrene Wisse* and those of the Wooing and Katherine Groups is clear: as more people sought the enclosure of the anchorhold, guides and texts were necessary to provide them with structure and focus, as well as to reinforce the presence of the larger Church in their daily lives.

The evidence of Christina, Ælfwynn, the *De Institutione Inclusarum* and *Ancrene Wisse* certainly supports recent scholarly claims that there was a particular attraction to the anchoritic life among women of the period, and indeed that the English anchoritic tradition was somehow always already feminine, starting with the feminization of enclosure in the *Vitae* of Guthlac²³ and leading to a feminization that ‘heralds the type of imagistic and exegetical development ... of representations of the anchorhold in the later Middle Ages as a womb-like space and of the anchorite, whether male or female, as highly eroticized *sponsa Christi*’.²⁴

Enclosure and the Anchoritic Experience

The anchoritic life was distinct from the lives of other medieval religious in several ways. Anchorites were seen, by some, as ‘spiritual aristocrats’.²⁵ Within the manuscripts of works like *Sawles Warde* and the *Wohunge* are also included the lives of female martyrs such as Margaret and Katherine. As Savage and Watson point out, ‘there is a persistent implication in the [works] that anchoresses are the latter-day equivalents of the martyrs.’²⁶ Like the communities of nuns and beguines,²⁷ there was no actual order that determined the rules for life within the anchorhold.²⁸ In the case of the female anchorites, however, informal rules did exist in the form of Aelred of Rievaulx’s *De Institutione Inclusarum* and, of course, *Ancrene Wisse*.²⁹ The earliest English rule, *De Institutione*, was written in approximately 1160 for a female recluse (possibly Aelred’s sister). Aelred is mentioned as a saint in the earliest manuscripts of *Ancrene Wisse*,³⁰ indicating that the author knew him and his work, and that his *De Institutione* may have served as a source for *Ancrene Wisse* itself. Some scholars see Aelred’s work as more open to possibilities for female sanctity and independence,³¹ arguing that by the date of *Ancrene Wisse* possibilities for women had begun to diminish and that the text itself serves as an effort on the part of a (male) author to rein in the potentially unruly behaviour of religious women and reinstate the authority of the Church.³² In any case, *De Institutione* and *Ancrene Wisse* (and thus the Wooing and Katherine Groups) form a continuum of anchoritic experience and literature in the

early Middle Ages and provide the basis for the discussions of the anchoritic tradition within the essays presented in this volume.

Ancrene Wisse describes the style of dress, amount of food, schedule of prayers, and contact with the outside world that would be experienced by the anchorite. The life of the anchorite was more confined than that of any other religious of the period. She was, in effect, a hermit.

Within the interior of a convent or attached to a church there was to be a room twelve feet square which communicated with the world through three narrow windows. One window was to look into the church and through it the recluse could watch mass, receive communion, speak with his confessor, and hear confession from others if he were a priest. A second window was for service: through it food and other necessities for his living were provided. A third, to allow light, was to be covered with a horn. If the recluse were a priest the cell might contain an altar. A garden was permitted.³³

Each anchorite would participate in her own funeral mass in order to be considered dead to her past life and material concerns. This is different from communities of nuns and beguines, for example, for whom much of their time was spent in ministering to the community. The anchorite would have no commerce with the community except through her maidservant (whom she rarely saw), her confessor and any traveller who wished to speak to her. This kind of conversation (like the one documented between Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe) would have taken place through a black curtain with a cross cut into it into which white fabric was inserted.

Ʒe clað in ham beo two-fald. Blac the clað, Ʒe cross hwit wiðinnen ant withuten. Ʒet blake clað bitacneð Ʒet Ʒe beoð blake and unwurð to Ʒe world withuten ... Ʒe hwite limpeð ariht to hwit meidenhad ant to cleannesse Ʒet is mucche pine wel forte halden.³⁴

(Let the cloth in them be of two kinds: the cloth black, the cross white, both inside and outside. The black cloth symbolizes to the world outside that you are black and unworthy ... The white cross is proper to white maidenhood and to purity, which it is very hard to keep well.³⁵)

Any contact that the anchorite would have with others (including other anchorites) would be through letters or messages delivered by each woman's maid or spoken through this curtain. Further, leaving the anchorhold was strictly forbidden. It was similar to the vows taken by a nun; if a nun wished to leave the cloister and rescind her vows, contact would have to be made with the pope for permission to be given. It would

be much easier for a beguine to leave her community. As Galloway writes, 'in terms of survival of beguine communities, the women could retain the use of private property and work to support themselves. They were free to leave the beguinage at any time to marry or enter an established order.'³⁶ An anchorite, on the other hand, relinquished all material goods, all personal relationships, and was not expected to leave the anchorhold until her death. Elkins describes the ritual of enclosure, recorded 'near Canterbury in the mid- to late twelfth century':³⁷

the ritual of enclosure took place during a mass, over which a bishop normally officiated. The recluse lay prostrate during the office of readings in the western part of the church, 'where it is customary for women to stay' ... After the recluse was sprinkled with holy water and censed with the thurible, she stood to receive two lit candles ... after the gospel reading, the recluse made her petition ... [after a homily or further readings] the choir intoned the funeral antiphon ... and the rites for the dying were begun ... with holy water and incense, the celebrant prepared the recluse's cell, called a 'sepulcher' in the liturgy. She would then enter her 'sepulcher' singing the antiphon, 'Here I will stay forever, this is the home I have chosen.' The bishop would then sprinkle dust over the recluse and the service would end with the 'prayers traditionally said over the body of the deceased in the bier'.³⁸

The recluse or anchorite would then be left alone in her cell.³⁹

This initiation ceremony was not too far removed from that of the enclosure of the nun within the cloister (in some cases); however, the other alternative for religious life, the beguinage, was quite distinct. Galloway writes,

each community [of beguines] regulated its own order of existence and defined the way in which members of the house were to behave ... beguines took no irrevocable vows ... aspirants appeared before the parish priest or bishop's officer, promised to observe celibacy while living in the community and to cultivate a humble and frugal lifestyle and renounced personal wealth.⁴⁰

While beguines and nuns had some mobility, the anchorite occupied a fixed location and would, generally, remain in her cell until her death. The most notable exception to this, for a female anchorite, is Christine Carpenter⁴¹ who was enclosed at Shere in 1329 and sometime thereafter left her cell but by 1332 was requesting permission from the pope to be re-enclosed:

she has lightly left her anchorhold and has gone back to the world. Now by the Lord's remedy changed in heart and wishing to return to her former place and established way of life, she has made humble petition to us that she may be

treated mercifully ... the same anchoress to you within the space of four months from this our jurisdiction, and she having appeared, you should restore her to the said reclusory or, if she will not be secure there, she should be re-enclosed elsewhere lest, by gadding about [*evagando*] for longer through the world, she be exposed to the bites of the rapacious wolf and – heaven forbid – her blood be required at your hands.⁴²

As Liz McAvoy has argued,⁴³ the reason for Christine's departure from her cell is unknown (in the film *Anchoress* it is speculated to be a reaction to her mother's death) but the fact that she requested to be re-enclosed indicates some preference for life inside the cell as opposed to that beyond it. There are other examples of anchorites who left their cells, either to be re-enclosed later or not;⁴⁴ however, for the most part an anchorite remained enclosed until death and was very often buried in the anchorhold itself:

Ancrene Wisse recommends that anchoresses should 'each day scrape up the earth of their graves, in which they will rot'. Skeletons have indeed been discovered in the foundations of a number of those cells which have been excavated, including one at the church of St. Anne Lewes (Sussex), where the squint is so positioned that, in order to be able to see the altar, the thirteenth century anchorite would have had to kneel in her own grave.⁴⁵

Although we know very little about most anchorites in the Middle Ages, we can speculate on what they must have been like based on the information gathered through recent scholarship. The women who may have been the intended readers of the Wooing Group were most likely aristocratic, educated daughters of prominent Anglo-Norman families whose understanding of *fine amor* and the literary traditions of chivalric romance and vernacular love poetry prepared them well for the text, which includes all of these traditions as it seeks to instruct its audience on the proper behaviour and spiritual deportment of female anchorites. Whether the audience (intended or inherited) was wide or small,⁴⁶ there was clearly a need by about 1225⁴⁷ for multiple texts for female anchorites which would instruct them as to their inner and outer lives, as well as texts upon which they could meditate and consider their personal, intimate relationship with Christ. Catherine Innes-Parker in her essay in this volume, '*De Wohunge of ure Lauerd* and the tradition of affective devotion: rethinking text and audience', re-examines some recent approaches to the audiences of the Wooing Group, connecting the texts to the Franciscan works of the later thirteenth century (perhaps through their transmission from Franciscan scriptoria) and to specific communities of women such as the de Braose family, exempla of the

kind of women for which both *Ancrene Wisse* and the Wooing Group were created. Although she does not argue that these women were the subjects of *Ancrene Wisse*, she seeks to re-examine how we understand female readers of medieval texts:

We must assume a maturity of outlook far removed from what we have come to think of as the ‘reader of romance’, the maidenly anchoress, or the inexperienced girl, cloistered and sheltered from the world. Rather, we should think of the readers of the *Wohunge* as sophisticated, educated, aristocratic and awe-inspiring women, who have, after experiencing a full, rich and, possibly, rewarding life in the world, have turned away from all that life has to offer and chosen the solitude of the anchorhold – bringing with them all that they have learned from the world, and fully understanding what they are leaving.⁴⁸

What we know for certain about the life of an anchorite, at least as far as her life is described by the rules and ecclesiastical writings of the Middle Ages, is that hers was a life of sensual deprivation, solitude and contemplation. The response that the individual anchorites had to such isolation forms the thematic and symbolic content of the Wooing Group, works intended to be read by female anchorites which sought to provide a space for their spiritual and creative expression, and, as will be demonstrated by several of the contributors to this volume, their erotic and poetic activity, as well.

The Language of the Wooing Group

The language of the Wooing Group is Middle English. The dialect of the Middle English has been referred to as the ‘AB language’ since J. R. R. Tolkien’s invention of the term in his 1929 article, ‘*Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meidhad*’. Tolkien defines it as AB based on his study of two of the *Ancrene Wisse* manuscripts, Corpus 402 (A) and Bodley 34 (B). The earliest likely date for the AB language, and thus the Wooing Group, is about 1200 (although this is widely contested).⁴⁹ Because *Ancrene Wisse* appears to have been copied from an earlier original, the AB language actually refers to the dialect of that now lost original ‘ur-text’ from which they derive. Tolkien opened up a new field of Middle English language study with this article, arguing: ‘the localization or dating of either the manuscripts, or the language of A and B is then of much greater importance to the general problem of the *Ancrene Wisse* than has been allowed.’⁵⁰ W. Meredith Thompson, in his 1958 edition of the Wooing Group, identifies the dialect of the Group as AB, stating:

each [manuscript], in several important features, agrees with AB. Also, the language of each manuscript can probably be explained as the admixture of not more than two dialects (AB+x); and, when variants occur, one of these, in nearly every case, is consonant with AB ... it is therefore clearly evident that the [Wooing Group] manuscripts ... are closely connected, not only in content and style (as has been shown) but linguistically; moreover, that the bond of their relationship is a common AB element which they all share.⁵¹

In his article in this collection, Jeremy Smith points out that 'MSS A and B, although copied by different scribes, may simply derive their language from the writing-system of a single scribe who produced their exemplars. That single scribe could well, of course, have been the same person as the scribe of either A or B.'⁵² The AB language is unique because, although the manuscripts are all post-Conquest, they retain an approximately equal amount of Old Norse⁵³ words and Anglo-Norman (French), with more Old Norse, based on the date, than one might expect. S. R. T. O. d'Ardenne argues that this occurs because the scribes of the AB manuscripts were 'conservative clerks who loved the English language as they knew it'.⁵⁴ As suggested in Michael Sargent's article in this collection (and in Thompson and elsewhere), there is evidence to suggest that the texts found in the Wooing Group are original and may pre-date *Ancrene Wisse*. It is really impossible to date any of the works exactly, though Jeremy Smith has made great headway in locating the probable site of their composition as north Herefordshire or mid-Shropshire.⁵⁵ This location for the composition of the texts may contradict a long-held belief that they were written in Wigmore Abbey, in Herefordshire, which was first posited by E. J. Dobson and has been supported by most scholars since.⁵⁶ What we do know about the language and provenance of the Wooing Group manuscripts is that they were written in answer to some need among the anchorites of a particular region of thirteenth-century England for literature and for guidance. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* refers to other books that are available to his audience: '3e habbeð of þeos blissen iwriten ellesher, mine leoue / sustren'⁵⁷ and specifically to a copy of the life of Margaret ('ower Englische boc of Seinte Margar= / ete'.⁵⁸ Thus we know a community of female anchorites existed who shared texts (perhaps whole manuscripts, perhaps single sheets of vellum, as suggested by the brevity of many of the Wooing Group works) which were 'small enough to hold without weariness, clear enough to be read in the dim light of a cell'.⁵⁹ We know they must have been affiliated with a monastic house, though the type of order is unknown; we know they were literate and therefore came from a class of women who would have been able to read English. Beyond that, we know very little beyond what

we know of actual women who were enclosed in the twelfth and thirteenth century, and that evidence, too, is limited, although some examples are available, such as Christina of Markyate and Christine Carpenter; it is also assumed that Julian of Norwich, about whom a great deal more is known, read *Ancrene Wisse*,⁶⁰ though there is no conclusive evidence. However, the relationships between her ‘short text’, *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman*,⁶¹ and the works of the Wooing Group are clear⁶² and are suggestive of a tradition of English mysticism and anchoritism – from these works in the thirteenth century to Rolle and Hilton, through to Julian and Margery Kempe in the fifteenth century – with a unique theological, literary and linguistic presence within the larger tradition of medieval devotional writing.

The Wooing Group in its Literary Context

The connections between early medieval English literature and the Wooing Group are clear; these are works that stand up both to theological and literary scrutiny. As Watson writes, ‘the anchoritic works suggest a spirituality which demanded considerable self-knowledge and subtlety on the part of those who attempted it; the brilliance and humanity of the works should be seen as reflecting their audience as much as on their authors.’⁶³ As has been argued by Thompson (and noted in this collection by Michael Sargent), the Wooing Group texts are probably original, except for ‘the *Lofsong of Ure Lefdi* [which] freely translates the *Oratio ad Sanctam Mariam* of Marbod of Rennes’.⁶⁴ As such, Thompson includes the *Oratio* as a final appendix to his edition. However, although these works are original, they are closely related to the works associated with them, particularly *Ancrene Wisse*. Scholars such as Savage and Watson, Bella Millett, Robert Hasenfratz, and Thorlac Turville-Petre have successfully argued for a literary context into which *Ancrene Wisse* fits, drawing on its earlier English antecedents (such as *Lazamon’s Brut* and *The Owl and the Nightingale*)⁶⁵ while also being influenced by the twelfth-century Latin literature of the Continent.⁶⁶ Referring back to traditional sources of the Group, such as Bernard of Clairvaux and *The Song of Songs*, Bella Millett, in her essay in this volume, ‘The Conditions of Eligibility in *þe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*’, traces connections between such works as the ‘pseudo-Ambrosian “Passion of St Agnes”’ and Isidore of Seville, noting the relationship between the language of desire and erotic union in the Wooing Group texts and these earlier works. In her essay, Millett re-emphasizes the nature of the erotic, the marriage relationship between the anchoritic audience and Christ, while

also claiming for the Group an authority through the patristic works that has rarely been associated with it.

A central connection among these works, one which may be less significant in the Katherine Group and *Ancrone Wisse*, is the notion of mysticism: the works of the Wooing Group clearly participate in an English mystical tradition begun in the Anglo-Saxon period with *The Dream of the Rood* and extending through, again, to the works of Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe and the later work associated with the Wooing Group, *A Talkyng of the Loue of God*. In his contribution to this volume, Michael Sargent explores the relationship of *A Talkyng* to the rest of the works in the Wooing Group and its connection to patristic works of its own century, examining not only to what categories these works may actually belong, but also the idea and structure of the categories themselves, deconstructing, to an extent, the way we read medieval mysticism and how we see it in relation to other genres of medieval writing. Not all anchorites are mystics, of course, nor are all mystics anchorites.

The mystic exists paradoxically in a type of *figurative* exile even from within a

community; alone, though not solitary, by means of her extraordinary experience of God, she is separated spiritually and emotionally from those people with whom she may have physical contact. So, too, the anchorite embodies this same paradox because of the relative physical and social isolation which she experiences, often within a larger urban setting.⁶⁷

Aelred of Rievaulx's insistence that anchorites remain in solitude sets the stage for the mystical transcendence experienced by so many of them, for in place of the love of human beings, Aelred argues for an intense and focused meditation upon God, divine love and the recluse's symbolic marriage to Christ, all of which prefigure the imagery of the *Wohunge* and other mystical texts produced by women. Aelred instructs his sister to 'picture herself as being at the crucifixion and watching as the soldier opened Jesus' side'.⁶⁸ The speaker of the *Wohunge* makes a similar suggestion:

Hwat mai þole for þe
for al þat þu þoledest for me? Ah me
bihoueð þat tu beo eað to paie .
a wrecche bodi & a wac bere
ich ouer eorðe . & tat swuch as
hit is haue 3iuen & 3iue wile
to þi seruise . Mi bodi henge
wið þi bodi neiled o rode . sper-

re querfaste wið inne fowr
 wahes & henge i wile wið þe
 & neauer mare of mi rode cu
 me til þat i deie.⁶⁹

(what can I suffer for you for all that you have suffered for me? Ah, you must be easy to pay! A wretched body and a weak one I bear over earth – and that, such as it is, I have given and will give to your service. My body will hang with your body, nailed to the cross, fastened, transfixed within four walls. And I will hang with you and nevermore come from my cross until I die.⁷⁰)

In the *Wohunge*, and similarly in contemporary works such as *Sawles Warde* and *Ancrene Wisse*, the narrator finds herself participating in the Crucifixion, not only watching the action and kissing Christ's abject body as Aelred describes, but being pierced and beaten *with* him, celebrating her physical death with his in order to find even more glory in a mutual resurrection. In her essay in this volume, "'Þe blod þ[at] bohte": The Wooing Group Christ as pierced, pricked, and penetrated body', Michelle M. Sauer addresses the relationship of the *Wohunge* texts to medieval and contemporary notions of the blood of Christ, examining their impact on the text as a metaphor and on the reader of the text, the anchoritic figure enclosed and contemplating Christ's death, whose participation in Christ's death empowers her to a kind of 'spiritual perfection' otherwise unavailable to her. She writes:

The anchoress lived with a constant threat of rape and violation; through mimetic mapping, Christ's wounded presence relieves her of some of that fear. As well, the anchoress's body threatened the purity of the church, while Christ's stainless, bleeding body neutralizes potential harm. When the two merge, his body becomes a stand in for hers, able to withstand sin and temptation, and able to overcome pollution and corruption through his saving blood, thus making the wounded, bleeding Christ a necessary part of the anchoritic vocation.⁷¹

The climate that produced the *Wohunge* was one in which relationships between religious men and women were ambiguously defined, and the energy of the recluse which would have been used in human relationships was to be channelled into a more passionate union with Christ. The *Wohunge* is an example for the recluse of how such intense emotion and energy might be used when applied to a meditation of the crucified body of Christ. Inherent in the experience of the anchoress was her own suffering, her own worldly death, and a personal contemplation of the death of Christ. This makes her experience different from that of nuns or beguines who

very often focused their vocation on service and community. That is not to say that nuns did not, in some cases, take on a life of self-inflicted suffering (through flagellation, starvation and isolation), but the kind of suffering and abjection *gloried in* by the anchoress is distinct from anything that normally took place within a convent or abbey. The medieval mystic knew all too well about this side of life – i.e., the sensual nature of bodily function, as Watson describes it, a ‘constancy of suffering, this positive activity of the manufacture of joy out of pain’.⁷² Thus the *Wohunge* becomes a manual, or *exemplum*, of the kind of mystical union that could be achieved when the “body” was denied and a union of the spirit was pursued.⁷³

The truly innovative literary qualities of the Wooing Group extend beyond the rules and orders of *Ancrene Wisse*. In the texts of the Wooing Group the authors create a space for feminine desire to be expressed, for the female imaginary to be articulated, and for a feminine voice, privately found and publicly denied, to be expressed in relation to the object of desire which is the focus of the works: the body of Christ. Sarah Salih, Anne Savage and myself, in our contributions to this volume, argue for a post-modern critical approach to the nature of the mystical abjection and erotic discourse found so beautifully expressed in the works of the Wooing Group. Anne Savage examines the ‘emotional engagement’ and affective piety of the works of the Wooing Group in her essay, ‘The Wooing Group: Pain, Pleasure and the Anchoritic Body’, using the work of French feminists such as Julia Kristeva and Chantal Chawaf as well as those of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida to explore notions of pain and pleasure as they are expressed in both *Ancrene Wisse* and the texts of the Wooing Group. She writes:

Emotional engagement is written into the anchoritic texts: attention is drawn again and again to affective response. That affect is bodily, not simply spiritual, is also recognized in medieval writing generally ... meditation on emotions directed by such readings, and the performance of devotions, open[s] the walls of the body further and further into the dimension of the Divine.⁷⁴

Salih pursues potentially queer readings of the works in her essay, ‘Transvestism in the Anchorhold’, by discussing the gender of the author of the works and the relationship of Wooing Group itself to gender and particularly to queer notions of identity and subjectivity. Focusing in part on sexuality and materiality, she argues that

an anchoress might be susceptible to erotic stimulus from a man, a woman, herself or even, as it later transpires, ‘a ladles þing’ (innocent thing). [These works]

show an assumption that sex is usually expected to be between a man and a woman. This is not a heterosexuality, because sexual difference is not the issue: men and women are more like each other than women and women, less like each other than women and things.⁷⁵

In my article, titled 'Speaking of flesh and soul: linguistic and spiritual translation in the Wooing Group', I explore possible variations on the idea of translation in the Wooing Group, examining the textual, social and spiritual ramifications of the notion of translation (of the texts themselves, the mystical experience, the flesh, the subjectivity of the feminine speakers) from the position of gender and cultural criticism. Influenced by queer theory, gender theory and the works of many of the contributors to this volume, particularly Anne Savage, I examine the bleeding body of Christ and the abject body of the anchoritic mystic in terms of a mutual translation of identity and flesh.

The *Wohunge* itself, as is demonstrated admirably by the contributors to this volume, is a sensuous meditation on the Passion of Christ in which the speaker witnesses and participates in Christ's death, grieving for his suffering while also 'joying in' his abjection (and her own, both of which end through his Resurrection). The text relies on metaphors of courtly romance and biblical sources, drawing mainly from the Song of Songs but making reference throughout to other biblical texts such as Psalms, Proverbs and the New Testament books of Matthew and Luke.⁷⁶ Jennifer N. Brown, in her contribution, focuses on what she calls the *mantra* of the *Wohunge*, the passages such as that that begins the poem, 'A iesu swete iesu mi luue . mi / lef . mi lif . mi luue leuest'. Brown discusses the formulaic nature of the work, emphasizing its potential for memorization and, as such, its true meditational nature. Brown uses recent approaches to both the Wooing Group and the Song of Songs to address the transference of identity between Christ and the feminine subject of the works, explaining that the text provides a 'slippery' location for the nature of wooer and wooed. Bella Millett also examines sources and texts which have linguistic and literary connections to the Wooing Group in her contribution to this volume. She argues that the Wooing Group texts draw from sermons, pastoralia and the marriage sermons of Parisian writers such as Robert of Sorbon. But although the *Wohunge* and the other texts in the Group draw on all of these works, they remain predominately original and unique in English literature of the period, partly in their linguistic construction, and partly in their insistence on feminine subjectivity through the emotional and physical enclosure of the anchorhold. As the contributions in this collection demonstrate, the works in the Wooing Group represent a moment in time in which

the language of desire and the voice of the marginalized, abject anchorite merge into a discourse of love, erotic and divine, and provide a framework upon which the later anchoritic writers in English, Richard Rolle, Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich among them, could continue to build.

Conclusion

Many of the essays in the collection overlap; most quote from and discuss multiple works within the Wooing Group. This in itself is an achievement of sorts, for although several scholars have begun to cite and discuss *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd* in the context of medieval mysticism, gender, literary history and anchoritism,⁷⁷ this seems to be the only text from within the Group that gets mentioned, at least for the most part. Perhaps this is because of the nature of the work itself; *De Wohunge* is a powerful meditation on the Passion, providing details that startle the imagination in their graphic nature, both of the death of Christ and of the desire of the speaker of the work to become one with his brutalized body. However, the other works are equally fascinating and are studied at greater length here than ever before, although they all represent just a first step towards a greater understanding of the Group, its context, and its meaning to a modern audience. Another way in which the works overlap is in their approach to the main theme of the texts, which, again is the Passion of Christ and the erotic nature of the speaker's witness to that Passion. Some of the authors represented here emphasize the erotic, some emphasize the literary nature of desire in the works; some explore the gender of the speakers of the works, while others continue the half-century-long discussion, begun in Thompson's edition, with the gender of the author. Perhaps the most important overlap and leitmotif of the collection, however, is the frequent return to and exploration of the relationship of the Wooing Group to other works, those within its own milieu, such as *Ancrene Wisse* and the Katherine Group and its most commonly noted predecessor, the Song of Songs, as well as other more distant connections, to Thomas of Hales, for example, Bernard of Clairvaux, the Franciscan authors of the thirteenth century, the English mystics such as Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, and other works not often associated with the Group, works and authors connected to the Wooing Group through linguistic, theological and textual threads that seem to connect it with a much wider, more significant tradition.

The purpose of this collection is not to close the book, as it were, on the study of the texts associated with the Wooing Group, nor is it intended to be

the final word on such notions as authorship, language, narrative technique, anchoritic studies or any other topic associated with the works of the Group. Instead, it is intended as a starting-point for scholars who wish to explore the early English tradition of mystical writing, of the experience of women, of enclosure and the reclusive life, and of the various themes and issues brought forward by these accomplished contributors. Although the Wooing Group is an artefact of a brief moment in literary and linguistic history, its presence is a powerful testimony to the strength and authority of the late twelfth/early thirteenth centuries in England as it developed from an occupied Anglo-Saxon culture to a world power of political and social influence. Its milieu and context bring to modern scholars a glimpse of life, not only for religious people, scribes, anchorites and their communities, but for the daily intellectual and spiritual lives of English people in this era, something often left out of larger studies of post-Conquest England.

Notes

- ¹ Anonymous, 'Thirteenth century prose', review of *De Wohunge of ure Lauerde*, EETS os 241, ed. W. Meredith Thompson (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), *Times Literary Supplement*, 3 July 1959, p. 400. It is in Thompson's edition that he first described the texts included in the edition as 'the "Wooing Group"' (p. xvi); he also abbreviates the title of the poem in his edition as *Wohunge*. For purposes of consistency, in this edition the contributors will follow Thompson's conventions and refer to the collection of texts as the Wooing Group and the poem itself, when not described by its complete title, as the *Wohunge*.
- ² G.V. Smithers, review of *De Wohunge of ure Lauerde*, *Medium Ævum*, xxxl.3 (1962), 216–18 (p. 216).
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Several of the texts under discussion in this volume have been edited and translated in very recent editions. *Ancrene Wisse*, for example, has appeared in two excellent editions, one by Bella Millett: *Ancrene Wisse: 2 Volumes: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 402, with Variants from Other Manuscripts* EETS os 325, 326 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005 and 2006); and one by Robert Hasenfratz: *Ancrene Wisse*, TEAMS Middle English Text Series (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS, 2000). While Millett's is more exhaustive and thorough, Hasenfratz's is more affordable, and since they are both based on Corpus Christi, MS 402, they can both be used with confidence by a scholar examining these works in Middle English. As stated previously, Savage and Watson's 1991 translation is the best version available in Modern English. Several works of the Katherine Group were edited in an *en face* edition of Modern and Middle English in 1990 as *Medieval English Prose for Women: From the Katherine Group and Ancrene Wisse*. This edition does not include the lives of St Katherine or

Juliana from the Group, which were translated in Savage and Watson's collection and edited in Middle English for the Early English Text Society: *Be Liflade ant te Passiun of Seinte Juliene*, EETS os 248, ed. S. R. T. O. d'Ardenne (1961) and *Seinte Katerine*, EETS ss 7, ed. S. R. T. O. d'Ardenne and E. J. Dobson (1981). The Wooing Group itself has been edited in full only once in Middle English (Thompson, 1958), but will appear in two new editions close to the time when this volume itself will be published. Catherine Innes-Parker will publish an edition and translation of the Wooing Group for Broadview Press and Michelle M. Sauer will soon publish her edition, *The Wohunge Group and A Talkyng of the Loue of God: Translated from the Middle English with Introduction, Notes, and Interpretive Essay*, Library of Medieval Women (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2009). Although these last two editions are excellent and will contribute greatly to the study of the anchoritic tradition in the future, since they are not yet in print the contributions to this volume will use Thompson's edition for Middle English quotations and Savage and Watson's edition for modern English translations. Quotations from *Ancrene Wisse* will be taken from Millett's 2006–8 edition unless otherwise noted by the author(s).

- ⁵ Scholarship of the Wooing Group began with a reference to the *Oreisun of Seinte Marie* in Oswald Cockayne's edition of *Hali Meidenhad* in 1866 (EETS os 18), although as mentioned in note 10 it owes a greater debt to Richard Wülher's work a decade later. There was not another significant contribution to scholarship on the Wooing Group until Rose Jeffries Peebles's 1910 dissertation from Bryn Mawr, focusing on medieval legends of Longinus, in which she argues that *A Talkyng of the Loue of God* was based on texts from the Wooing Group (Millett, 1996, p. 78); immediately following Peebles there were two scholarly discussions: W. P. Ker's *English Literature, Medieval* (London: Williams, 1912) and George Salisbury's *A History of English Prose Rhythm* (London: Macmillan, 1912). M. Konrath draws in part on Peebles in his account of *A Talkyng of the Loue of God* and its connections to *Ureeisun of God Almihti* and *Be Wohunge of ure Lauerde* in 'Eine übersehene Fassung der Ureisun of Ure Lauerde, bez. Ureisun of God Almihti (Morris, Old English Homilies I., 183ff., 200ff.) und der Wohunge of ure Lauerd (ibid 269ff.)', *Anglia*, 42 (1918), 85–98 (see Millett, 1996, p. 84). There were no further direct critical responses to the Wooing Group until the 1950s.
- ⁶ Many critics refer to the texts that make up the Wooing Group, those that make up the Katherine Group, and *Ancrene Wisse* as the Ancrene Wisse Group. However, for obvious reasons it will be necessary to generalize with respect to the three categories themselves and the individual texts, when possible.
- ⁷ For the sake of consistency all of the contributors refer to these works as the Wooing Group, not by the Middle English title, the *Wohunge* Group, although beyond this volume scholars are mixed in their choice of title.
- ⁸ These dissertations include Catherine Innes-Parker, 'Virgin, bride, and lover: a study of the relationship between sexuality and spirituality in anchoritic literature' (Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1992); Denis Renevey, 'The moving of the soul: the functions of metaphors of love in the writings of Richard Rolle and antecedent texts in the medieval mystical tradition' (Oxford University, 1993); Susannah Mary Chewning, "'A marriage of the unknowable': language, gender,

and mysticism in *Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerde*' (Drew University, 1996); Sarah Salih, 'Versions of virginity in medieval texts and practices' (University of East Anglia, 1999); and Michelle M. Sauer, "'When you are at ease, talk to Jesus': identity and community in the *Wohunge* group' (Washington State University, 2000).

- ⁹ The most important scholarly work on anchoritism in England before 1990 is Ann K. Warren's *Anchorites and Their Patrons in Medieval England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985; soon to be republished by the University of Wales Press); this comprehensive study of the history of anchorites is extremely significant to the study of the anchoritic tradition. Warren's earlier article, 'The nun as anchoress, 1100–1500', in *Distant Echoes: Medieval Religious Women*, vol. 1, ed. John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank, Cistercian Studies Series 71 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984), pp. 197–212, is also a significant contribution to what was, by the 1980s, a growing audience of scholars interested not only in literary and linguistic studies of anchoritism, but also in the history and lives of these figures. Before Warren, there were several works that approached the subject of the history of religious enclosure in England: Lina Eckenstein, *Woman under Monasticism: Chapters on Saint-Lore and Convent Life between A.D. 500 and A.D. 1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896); Henrietta Auden, 'Shropshire hermits and anchorites', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, 3rd series, 9 (1909), 97–112; Charlotte Balfour, 'The anchoress', *New Catholic World*, 109 (1919), 203–11; Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries, c. 1275 to 1535*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922); and Francis D. S. Darwin, *The English Medieval Recluse* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1943). The work of Rotha Mary Clay has also been an important and significant contribution to anchoritic scholarship, beginning with *The Hermits and Anchorites of England* (London: Methuen, 1914) and including 'Further studies on medieval recluses', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 3rd series, 16 (1953), 74–86, and 'Some northern anchorites', *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 4th series, 33 (1955), 202–17.

- ¹⁰ The first critical essay devoted to the *Ancrene Riwe* (as it was then known) was Edmund Brock's article in *Transactions of the Philological Society* in 1865, although a brief article did appear following Morton's edition in 1854, in *Notes and Queries*, written by F. Madden. The earliest published critical essay focused on the Wooing Group was Richard Wülher's 'Übersicht der neuangelsächsischen Sprachdenkmäler', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, 1 (1874), 57–88. According to Millett (1996) this article provides 'a detailed critical survey of the [then] current state of scholarship on eME works produced c. 1200–1250, including ... the works of the *Katherine Group* and the *Wooing Group* (p. 69)'. The next article to discuss the Wooing Group at length is Eugen Eienkel's 'Eine englische Schriftstellerin aus dem Anfange des 12. Jahrhunderts', *Anglia*, 5 (1882), 265–82, which argues that *Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerde*, as well as other Wooing Group texts, were authored by a woman (Millett, 1996, p. 70). This idea has remained the central controversy about the authorship of the Wooing Group, although most of the authors represented in this volume, and indeed most recent scholarship, have agreed that the author is male.

- ¹¹ Thompson, p. xxii.
- ¹² An eighth text that is often associated with the Group is the *Love Rune* of Thomas of Hales, ed. Susannah Grier Fein (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS, 1998). The *Love Rune* is associated with the Wooing Group because of its placement in the Vernon manuscript with *A Talkyng of the Loue of God* and its linguistic connections to the earlier works in the Group, as well as its theme of Christ as a lover, a *lefman*, for a misguided religious woman. However, it is not included here as a part of the Wooing Group due to its absence from any of the earlier manuscripts and its connection to a specific historic author. See Thompson, p. xxii, and Richard Morris and Walter W. Skeat, *Specimens of Early English*, pt. 1: 1150–1300, ed. Richard Morris (Oxford: Clarendon, 1887), p. 124.
- ¹³ There is some confusion about the two texts titled by Thompson as *On Lofsong of ure Lefdi* and *Be Oreisun of Seinte Marie*. The *Lofsong* appears in two manuscripts, Nero and Royal, and the *Oreisun* appears as a fragment in Royal. Morris gave the *Lofsong* its title, while the *Oreisun* has a title in the Royal manuscript. *Be Oreisun of Seinte Marie* is a fragment of thirty-one lines and appears to be a transcription of the first forty-four lines of *On Lofsong of ure Lefdi*. The confusion lies with a third text, *On God Ureisun of ure Lefdi*, which appears only in Nero. It was edited by Morris in *Old English Homilies and Homiletic Treatises* alongside *On Ureisun of ure Louerde*, *On Wel Swuðe God Ureisun of God Almihti*, *On Lofsong of ure Louerde*, *On Lofsong of ure Lefdi*, *Be Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, and, in an appendix, *Be Oreisun of Seinte Marie*. Morris does not explain the context of the works and, apparently, saw *On God Ureisun of ure Lefdi* as part of the Wooing Group. The work, however, is a love poem to Mary, in the tradition of what Thompson describes, citing Hope Emily Allen, as ‘the cult of the Blessed Virgin’ (p. xx). Thompson leaves it out of his edition entirely, as do Savage and Watson, who write: ‘Nero also contains two other English works, *A Good Prayer to Our Lady*, which is in verse, and a version of the Apostles’ Creed in English. The association of these with the circle that produced the anchoritic works is not established, and so they have not been included here’ (p. 428, n. 1). Thus for the purposes of this collection, *On God Ureisun of ure Lefdi*, although a tantalizing possibility as being by the same author or, even more likely, intended for the same audience as the Wooing Group, is not included within the Group in this discussion.
- ¹⁴ *Ancrene Wisse* is found in two of the Wooing Group MSS, Cotton Titus D.xviii, which also contains the texts of the Katherine Group, and the Vernon MS, which also contains *A Talkyng of the Loue of God*.
- ¹⁵ The Katherine Group contains five works, all translated by Savage and Watson: *Sawles Warde*, *Hali Meidhad* and the lives of St Katherine, St Margaret and St Juliana, all of which appear in Wooing manuscripts Titus and Royal.
- ¹⁶ Nicholas Watson’s article, ‘The methods and objectives of thirteenth-century anchoritic devotion’, is the first work since Thompson’s introduction to the *Wohunge* in 1958 that thoroughly discusses these two groups from the perspective of spirituality and aesthetic quality. He distinguishes them from the mystical works of the fourteenth century (such as Hilton’s *Scale of Perfection*, Rolle’s *Meditations on the Passion*, the *Prickyng of Love*, Nicholas Love’s *Mirroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ*, the *Book of Vices and Virtues* and the *Cloud of Unknowing*). These

later works, for Watson, are characteristic of 'a spirituality of ascent or progress ... a spirituality of the interior life' (pp. 135–6) and seem 'relatively unspecialised, making little distinction between the solitary, the monastic and the secular life' (p. 136). Part of this lack of 'specialization' may be due to an obvious difference in audience between the two kinds of works. Rolle's audience was similar to that of the earlier works, in that he wrote some of his works for one or more enclosed women; Hilton and the *Cloud* author, however, wrote exclusively for a monastic audience – and in the case of the *Cloud*, that audience was decidedly male.

¹⁷ In this text as much as possible the word *anchorite* will be used rather than the sexualized term *anchoress*. Several scholars have weighed in on the problem of the word *anchoress* (Hasenfratz, Sauer, McAvoy); the word as it appears in the title of MS Corpus 402 is *ancrene*, which is non-gendered but, in the context of *Ancrene Wisse* refers to female anchorites. As such, the non-gendered *anchorite* seems a more appropriate modern word to use in reference to these figures, whether they are male or female.

¹⁸ Warren, p. 9.

¹⁹ McAvoy and Hughes-Edwards, p. 13.

²⁰ Although Guthlac may be the first named, recorded *anchorite* in England, the word *anchorite*, in an early form, *anker*, appears in the *Peterborough Chronicle* in the following phrase: 'Muneces þa wolden drohtien here lif on anker setle' (AD 656). This text was compiled in the last decade of the ninth century, so the form of the word, *anker*, is not Anglo-Saxon, but the presence of the anchorhold (or whatever is being described there) refers back that far. Still, since the location of this 'anker setle' is unclear and the disposition of the monks who sought to live there (if they were indeed recluses or if they were living a monastic life) is equally unknown, the best first account of an *anchorite* in England is still Guthlac. There is still some speculation, however, about the use of *anchorite* in English; for a discussion of the word's origins and its distinction from *reclusae* and hermits, see Warren, 1985.

²¹ McAvoy and Hughes-Edwards, p. 14.

²² Talbot, pp. 88, 92.

²³ See Bhattacharji, p. 42.

²⁴ McAvoy and Hughes-Edwards, p. 14.

²⁵ Nicholas Watson. 'The methods and objectives of thirteenth-century anchoritic devotion', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, ed. Marion Glasscoe, Exeter Symposium IV (Cambridge: Brewer, 1987), pp. 132–53.

²⁶ Savage and Watson, p. 20.

²⁷ Jacques de Vitry defines the beguines as 'discreet and devout maidens [who] do not find it suitable to remain in their parents' homes ... who are unable to find monasteries which will receive them [and] live together in a single house ... in profound poverty, having naught else but what they can acquire by spinning and working with their hands' (quoted in Galloway, p. 93).

²⁸ Grimlaic, a tenth-century French recluse, wrote a rule, *Regula Solitiorum*, which indicated that the anchorites he knew lived communally 'in a separate but connected cell whereby they would be able to support each other' (in Warren, p. 30, n. 22). Grimlaic's text appears to be the earliest known rule for anchorites, followed in the twelfth century by Aelred of Rievaulx.

- ²⁹ As has been argued by Hasenfratz, Wada and others, the title *Ancrene Wisse*, added by the scribe who copied the Corpus manuscript, seems to resist calling the text a rule: 'Wisse is a rare word derived from the OE verb *wissian* "to direct, guide, show the way" and, more rarely, "to rule, govern" ... Dobson suggests that the author uses it here to avoid the implication that the text is an actual rule ... and that it may mean something more than "advice" but less than "command"' (Hasenfratz, p. 419).
- ³⁰ Millett, 1996, p. 90, citing McNabb, Chambers and Thurston, 1926.
- ³¹ Roy, pp. 120–2.
- ³² There has been a long debate over the gender of the author of the works associated with *Ancrene Wisse*, and in particular the Wooing Group. Critics who assume a male author in this text include Savage and Watson in their 1991 edition of the poem; Millett in 'Women in no man's land: English recluses and the development of vernacular literature in the 12th and 13th centuries', in *Women and Literature in Britain 1150–1500*, ed. Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and a much earlier critic, John Bugge, who in 1975 assumes (without evidence or support) a male author. He writes, "it is clear that the author of the *Wohunge* is exhorting *his* female audience to return Christ's love in kind, that is, with the same lacerative physical sensibility he demonstrated toward them in his passion [my emphasis]' (p. 98). Bugge is also the earliest contemporary critic who makes the distinction that the author is almost certainly male, while the speaker is definitely female: 'in *De Wohunge of Ure Lauerd* the speaker describes *herself* yielding to Christ's supreme act of love [my emphasis]' (p. 106).
- ³³ Warren, p. 31.
- ³⁴ *Ancrene Wisse* 2:21–4, 30–1.
- ³⁵ Savage and Watson, p. 66.
- ³⁶ Galloway, p. 3.
- ³⁷ Elkins, p. 151.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 152.
- ³⁹ Evidence exists that some recluses lived in communities, within the same anchorholds (Elkins, p. 159). Because of this, both Aelred's *Rule for a Recluse* and *Ancrene Wisse* make comments about friendships between women. Elkins writes, '[Aelred] discouraged visits from nuns and other women ... the recluse was to "sit alone then, in silence, listening to Christ and speaking with him ... For then she is with Christ, and he would not care to be with her in a crowd"' (p. 154). Elkins goes on to argue that by the time of the Katherine Group (the period in which the *Wohunge* was probably first written), a fear of close relationships between celibates – heterosexual relationships as well as homosexual – was growing, so that by the late thirteenth century recluses were even further restricted: 'virginity was protected and the friendships abandoned' (p. 160).
- ⁴⁰ Galloway, pp. 3–4.
- ⁴¹ Christine Carpenter has been the subject of much speculation and contemporary study since the 1993 film *Anchoress*, written by Judith Stanley-Smith and Christine Watkins and directed by Chris Newby, and the novel *Anchoress of Shere* by Paul Moorcraft (London: Poisoned Pen Press, 2002). Scholarly treatments of Christine's story include Miri Rubin, 'An English anchorite: the making, unmaking

ing and remaking of Christine Carpenter', and Liz Herbert McAvoy's work (see notes 42 and 43 below).

- ⁴² Liz Herbert McAvoy, 'Letters concerning the enclosure of Christina Carpenter', in *Rhetoric of the Anchorhold: Space, Place and Body within the Discourses of Enclosure* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), pp. 237–40.
- ⁴³ Liz Herbert McAvoy, 'The cell as penitentiary: Christine Carpenter and hierarchies of repression', presented at the International Medieval Congress, Kalamazoo, MI, May 2006; 'Paragon, pariah, penitent, prisoner: constructing the anchoress, Christina Carpenter', presented at the Gender and Medieval Studies conference, Norwich, January 2007; and 'Gender, rhetoric and space in the Speculum Inclusorum, letter to a Bury recluse and the strange case of Christina Carpenter', in *Rhetoric of the Anchorhold: Place, Space and Body in the Discourses of Enclosure*, pp. 111–26.
- ⁴⁴ In the fourteenth century Matilda and Anna (of Leicester and Lincolnshire respectively) were accused of Lollard heresy; both were removed from their anchorholds and held in state prisons; Matilda returned to her anchorhold as 'anachorita reducta ad viam veritatis' (quoted in Warren, p. 80), while Anna's fate is unknown. Warren reports several recluses who left their solitary cells and entered the Bridgettine community at Syon Abbey (pp. 178–9). A Carmelite friar, Thomas Scrope, remained an anchorite for twenty years (1426–46) in Norwich but left his anchorhold and became bishop of Dromore in Ireland and, later, auxiliary bishop of Norwich (Warren, p. 211).
- ⁴⁵ E. A. Jones. 'Anchorites and hermits in historical context', in *Approaching Medieval English Anchoritic and Mystical Texts*, ed. Dee Dyas, Valerie Edden and Roger Ellis (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 3–18; p. 12. Jones's reference to *Ancrene Wisse* refers to the following: 'ha schulden schrapien euche dei the eorthe up of hare put thet ha schulen roten in' (2.815–16).
- ⁴⁶ *Ancrene Wisse* appears in full or partial form in seventeen manuscripts; for a full description see Hasenfratz, pp. 28–33; Bella Millett, *Ancrene Wisse, The Katherine Group, and The Wooing Group*. Annotated Bibliographies of Old and Middle English, no. 2, ed. Bella Millett, George B. Jack and Yoko Wada (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), pp. 49–59; Roger Dahood, 'Ancrene Wisse, the Katherine Group, and the Wohunge Group', in *Middle English Prose: A Guide to Major Authors and Genres*, ed. A. S. G. Edwards (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1984), pp. 1–34.
- ⁴⁷ The earliest manuscript date for *Ancrene Wisse* is 1225–30 according to Hasenfratz, p. 30. The Wooing manuscript has been dated by Thompson as 1200, possibly earlier (p. lx); Savage and Watson date it between 1220 and 1240 (p. 245).
- ⁴⁸ Innes-Parker, pp. 96–122.
- ⁴⁹ The extant manuscripts date from approximately 1225 to 1250. Savage and Watson (1991) agreed with this estimate; however, in an earlier work, Nicholas Watson is less certain about the date of the *Wohunge*: 'Dobson's arguments ... allow one to date *Ancrene Wisse* at 1210–1225 ... *Wohunge* is presumably later than this ... [but] a major dating problem ... is that in these works composition and adaptation are often indistinguishable activities, and that in the forms we have them some of the works may at once have influenced and have been influenced by

the same other works in various stages of the latter's existence' (1987, p. 148, n. 11). In her contribution to this volume, Millett argues that 'the internal evidence of the work [*Ancrene Wisse*] suggests a date of composition most probably in the late 1220s' (p. 30). See Millett, 1996, pp. 6–17 for a discussion of the controversy of dating the original AB source, as well as the extant texts themselves.

⁵⁰ J. R. R. Tolkien. '*Ancrene Wisse* and *Hail Meidhad*', *Essays and Studies*, 14 (1929): 104–26 (p. 114).

⁵¹ Thompson, pp. liii, lv.

⁵² Smith, pp. 84–95.

⁵³ Old Mercian according to Hans Käsman, who connected the phonology of *Ancrene Wisse* to a likely source, the Vespasian Psalter. This is echoed by Jeremy Smith in his article in this collection. See Hans Käsman review of *Ancrene Wisse: Parts Six and Seven*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd, *Anglia*, 80 (1962), 327–9.

⁵⁴ *Be Liflade ant te Passiun of Seinte Juliene*, EETS os 248, ed. S. R. T. O. d'Ardenne (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 177.

⁵⁵ See Millett, 1996, p. 11.

⁵⁶ Bella Millett, in the introduction to her bibliography, *Ancrene Wisse, the Katherine Group, and the Wooing Group* (1996) reviews the various arguments for location of the original author and leans towards Smith's evidence of a Shropshire provenance, finally acknowledging that a definite location or date for the manuscripts is 'hard to establish with any certainty' (p. 11).

⁵⁷ *Ancrene Wisse*, 7:365–6.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 4:791–2.

⁵⁹ Savage and Watson, p. 28.

⁶⁰ Hope Emily Allen suggests this in her discussion of the then newly discovered Trinity manuscript of *Ancrene Wisse* when she argues that Trinity (which includes a French version of *Ancrene Wisse*) 'was accessible to the world of Julian of Norwich'; 'The *Ancrene Riwe*', letter, *Times Literary Supplement*, 24 October 1936. Other editors and readers of Julian have also implied that Julian must have read *Ancrene Wisse*, including her most recent and successful editors, Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, as well as Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins.

⁶¹ Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins, in their recent edition, separate what has been known until now simply as the short text and the long text of Julian's *Revelations* into two distinct works, *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman* and *Revelations of Divine Love* (Introduction, p. 1).

⁶² Watson and Jenkins, p. 3

⁶³ Watson, 1987, p. 146.

⁶⁴ Thompson, p. xvi.

⁶⁵ Robert Hasenfratz, *Ancrene Wisse* (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS, 2000), p. 1.

⁶⁶ Millett in Hasenfratz, p. 2.

⁶⁷ Chewning, 2005, p. 104.

⁶⁸ Elkins, p. 155.

⁶⁹ *Be Wöhunge of ure Lauerd*, ll. 584–95.

⁷⁰ Savage and Watson, p. 256.

⁷¹ Sauer, pp. 123–48.

⁷² Watson 1987, p. 144.

⁷³ The body that is denied here is the vessel in which the soul travels. The concept of the body (the sensual and corporal) was very much attached to the mystic's journey to the divine: it is denied at first and later celebrated (or, at least, its functions are 'joyed in') as part of the process of abjection of self.

⁷⁴ Savage, pp. 166–78.

⁷⁵ Salih, pp. 149–65.

⁷⁶ See Savage and Watson, pp. 435–42.

⁷⁷ Some recent scholars who have made reference to the Wooing Group (mainly citing the *Wohunge*) include Lara Farina, *Erotic Discourse and Early English Religious Writing* (New York: Palgrave, 2006); Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans, and Sarah Salih (eds), *Medieval Virginites* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003); Sarah Salih (ed.), *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001); Dee Dyas, Valerie Edden and Roger Ellis (eds), *Approaching Medieval English Anchoritic and Mystical Texts* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005); and Robert Mills, *Suspended Animation: Pain, Pleasure and Punishment in Medieval Culture* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006).

The ‘Conditions of Eligibility’ in *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd*

BELLA MILLETT

Ah hwa ne mej luue þe, luueliche Iesu? For inwið þe ane am alle þe þinges igedered þat eauer muhen maken ani mon luuewurði to oðer. (But who cannot love you, adorable Jesus? For only in you are all those qualities found together which can ever make any person attractive to another.)¹

De Wohunge of ure Lauerd is a meditation on the reasons why Christ should be loved. The writer lists first those qualities which make him deserving of love, then the sufferings he has undergone to acquire it – poverty, humiliation and pain. All these reasons are linked in a single sequence by the repetition after each point of the refrain ‘A Iesu, mi swete Iesu, leue þat te luue of þe beo al mi likinge’ (O Jesus, my sweet Jesus, grant that your love may be all my desire); but the first group is marked off structurally from the second by opening and closing summaries listing the qualities which attract love, suggesting that it originated as a separate element.

The image of Christ as lover and husband of the individual soul is a commonplace in the literature of Christianity, and from the earliest period it was often particularly associated with the female virgin, holy in body as well as in spirit (‘sancta et corpore et spiritu’, 1 Cor. 7:34), whose renunciation of earthly suitors reinforced at a literal level her metaphorical status as bride of Christ. The way in which *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd* develops this theme, however, links it more specifically with contemporary developments in continental preaching.

Evidence for this continental connection was provided in a 1994 article by Nicole Bériou and David d’Avray, ‘The image of the ideal husband in

thirteenth-century France',² but their findings do not seem to have been picked up in more recent research on the *Ancrene Wisse* Group. Bériou and d'Avray draw attention to the use of similar lists of reasons why Christ should be loved in sermons on marriage preached in Paris in the second half of the thirteenth century. Their article focuses on a passage from a sermon on the text 'Nuptie facte sunt' (John 2:1) by the Parisian scholar and preacher Robert of Sorbon, delivered on 16 January 1261, as it survives in a *reportatio* by Peter of Limoges. Discussing the spiritual marriage between Christ and the soul, Robert offers an extended analogy between earthly and spiritual marriage: 'Et sciendum quod mulier que se uult maritare sex uel septem solet respicere in marito illo que anima fidelis debet in Christo respicere' (And it should be known that a woman who wants to get married will normally look for six or seven things in that husband which a faithful soul ought to look for in Christ). He then lists eight qualities which are desirable in a husband: he should be handsome (*pulcher*), strong and powerful (*fortis e poichanz*), rich (*diues*), well-born (*generosus*), generous (*largus*), kind (*pacificus*), wise (*sapiens*), and immortal (*immortalis*). He expands briefly on each point, using *auctoritates*, *exempla* and *similitudines*, to demonstrate that Christ satisfies all these conditions, whereas the Devil falls short.³

Bériou and d'Avray note that parallels to this passage can be found in some other late thirteenth-century Paris sermon manuscripts from the same milieu. A passage in a 1282 sermon on John 2:1 by Adam le Picard, listing six *conditiones* required of both an earthly and a heavenly bridegroom (good looks (*speciositas*), power or strength (*potentia corporalis uel fortitudo*), riches (*quod sit diues*), good family (*quod ... sit de bona progenie*), kindness (*quod sit benignus et mitis*), and wisdom (*quod sit sapiens*), corresponds closely enough in structure, content and order of points to Robert's treatment of the theme to suggest direct influence.⁴ An addition in note form in the margin of one of its manuscripts (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 14947) lists seven *conditiones* of eligibility in a husband ('que multum sunt honeste in sponso') which Christ satisfies: he is eloquent (*facundus*) and superlatively rich (*ditissimus*), wise (*sapientissimus*), handsome (*pulcherrimus*), powerful (*potentissimus*), and well-born (*nobilissimus*), as well as immortal (*durabilis et eternus*). Each point is supported by *auctoritates*, mainly from the first chapter of Hebrews.⁵ An expanded version of this addition survives in a sermon on John 2:1 by the Dominican Gérard of Mailly (a copy of which was owned by Robert of Sorbon).⁶ Some anonymous notes in a manuscript owned by Peter of Limoges, dating from c.1272–3 (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 16482), offer what looks like an abridgement, with some

variants, of Robert's treatment of the theme, listing nine points: the bridegroom of the soul should be handsome (*pulcher*), strong and worthy (*fortis et probus*), rich (*diues*), of noble birth (*nobilis generis*), generous (*largus*), not arrogant (*non superbus*), not extravagant ([*non*] *nimis* ... *largus*), wise (*sapiens*) and supremely good (*optimus*). But these are followed by another list of six points, expressed in superlatives throughout (Christ is a bridegroom who is *nobilissimus*, *ditissimus*, *sapientissimus*, *pulcherrimus*, *potentissimus* and *optimus*), again supported by quotations from the first chapter of Hebrews.⁷

Apart from these treatments of the theme, Bériou and d'Avray also note some shorter thirteenth-century lists of the 'conditions of eligibility', citing a five-point list in the *Distinctiones* of the Dominican Nicholas of Biard (d. 1261), where Christ is rich (*diues*), handsome (*pulcher*), wise (*sapiens*), kind to his wife (*benignus uxori*) and well-born (*nobilis*), and a four-point list, *genus*, *virtus*, *sapientia* and *pulchritudo*, in the postill on St John's Gospel by the Franciscan John of Wales (d. c. 1285).

Bériou and d'Avray draw attention to the parallels to Robert of Sorbon's list in *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd* (acknowledging the initial identification of the link by Marie Denley). The *Wohunge* gives a nine-point introductory summary of the qualities which make Christ a desirable lover: good looks ('feirnesse and lufsum neb, flesch hwit under schrud'), riches ('gold and gersum and ahte of þis werlde'), generosity ('freedom and largesse'), wisdom ('wit and wisdom and 3apschipe of werlde'), power and strength ('maht and strengðe'), noble birth ('noblesce and hehnesse of burðe'), courtesy ('þeaw and hendeleic and lastelese lates'), gentleness ('menske and mildeschipe and debonairte') and close relationship ('sibnesse').⁸ Although most of these qualities are represented by more than a single noun, items 2–8 are demarcated structurally by a repeated initial 'Sum(m)e' ('some people [are made more lovable by ...]), and item 9 by an introductory 'And 3ette ouer al þis' (And yet above all this).⁹ The more detailed exposition of these points which follows, and the concluding summary at lines 252–62, cover the same material, but (as Bériou and d'Avray note) in both cases it is divided into eight rather than nine categories, in the exposition by the repeated refrain, in the summary by the repeated introductory 'þu wið' (you with [this quality]); the sixth category in the initial list, courtesy, is conflated with the previous one, noble birth (as in lines 256–7, 'þu wið noblesce and hendeleic').

Not mentioned by Bériou and d'Avray, but also apparently related to some of the lists they describe, is the seven-point list of 'conditions of eligibility' which appears in another work of the *Ancrene Wisse* Group, in *Ancrene Wisse* Part 7:

'Bi luue', he seið, 'oðer hit is forte zeouen allunge, oðer hit is to sullen, oðer hit is to reauin ant to neomen with strengðe. Zef hit is forte zeouen, hwer maht tu biteon hit betere þen upo me? Nam Ich þinge feherest? Nam Ich kinge richest? Nam Ich hest icunnet? Nam Ich weolie wisest? Nam Ich monne hendest? Nam Ich þinge freolest? – for swa me seið bi large mon þe ne con nawt edhalden, þet he haueð þe honden, as mine beoð, iþurlet. Nam Ich alre þinge swotest ant swetest? Pus alle the reisuns hwi me ah to zeoue luue þu maht ifinden in me ...'

('Your love', he says, 'either is to be given outright, or it is for sale, or it is to be seized and taken by force. If it is to be given, where can you bestow it better than on me? Am I not the most handsome of all? Am I not the richest of kings? Am I not of the noblest ancestry? Am I not the wisest of the wise? Am I not the most courteous of men? Am I not the most generous of all? – for it is said of a generous man who can keep nothing back that he has holes in his hands, as I have. Am I not the sweetest and most fragrant of all? So you can find in me all the reasons why love should be given ...')¹⁰

Although the last of these conditions (sweetness and fragrance) has no clear parallel in the lists described above,¹¹ the remaining six (good looks, riches, high birth, wisdom, courtesy and generosity) can be paralleled in the list in *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, and in most cases in the Paris lists as well; the passage also shares the rhetorical framework of those Paris lists which express Christ's qualities as superlatives, and the *similitudo* of the generous man with pierced hands recurs as an illustration of generosity in the passage from Robert of Sorbon: 'Vnde habet manus perforatas, ut dicitur de largo' (Therefore [Christ's] hands have holes in them, as is said of the generous man).¹² At an earlier point in Part 7, the theme of generosity is dealt with rather more fully, again using elements (the *auctoritas* 'Omnia subieciisti ...' and the following point, that Christ even gave us himself) shared with Robert of Sorbon:

Godd haueð ofgan ure luue on alle cunne wise... Muchel zeoue ofdraheð luue. Me, al þe world he zef us in Adam, ure alde feader; ant al þet is i þe world he weorp under ure fet, beastes ant fuheles, ear we weren forgulte. 'Omnia subieciisti sub pedibus eius; oues et boues uniuersas, insuper et pecora campi, volucres celi, et pisces maris qui perambulant semitas maris' [Psalms 8:8–9] ... He dude zet mare: zef us nawt ane of his, ah dude al him seoluen. Se heh zeoue nes neauer i zeuen to se lahe wrecches. Apostolus: 'Christus dilexit Ecclesiam et dedit semetipsum pro ea' [Ephesians 5:25]. Crist, seið Seinte Pawel, luuede swa his leofmon þet he zef for hire þe pris of him seoluen.

(God has earned our love in every kind of way ... A generous gift attracts love. Why, he gave us the whole world through Adam, our forefather; and everything

that is in the world, animals and birds, he cast under our feet, before we fell through sin. 'You have put all things under his feet: all sheep and cattle, and in addition the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea which travel the paths of the sea ...' He did still more: not only gave us such things as were his, but gave himself completely. Such a noble gift was never given to such base wretches. The Apostle says, 'Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it.' Christ, says St Paul, loved his beloved so much that he gave the price of himself for her.)¹³

The correspondences between the English and continental lists indicate a connection, but an unexpected one: why should these passages from later thirteenth-century Paris sermons be so closely paralleled at an earlier date in England, in the provincial and vernacular works of the *Ancrene Wisse* Group? Bériou and d'Avray comment on the *Wohunge* passage, 'A special problem is posed by [*De Wohunge of ure Lauerd*] ... The list of qualities is almost the same as Robert [of Sorbon]'s, but seems to be earlier.'¹⁴ Although the exact dating of *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd* is uncertain, a *terminus ante quem* is provided by its only surviving manuscript (London, British Library, Cotton Titus D.xviii), which has been dated to the second quarter of the thirteenth century, probably the 1240s.¹⁵ The list in *Ancrene Wisse* must be still earlier; the earliest surviving manuscript (London, British Library, Cotton Cleopatra C.vi), has recently been dated by Malcolm Parkes to the early 1230s,¹⁶ and the internal evidence of the work suggests a date of composition most probably in the late 1220s.¹⁷ Bériou and d'Avray, working from the reasonable assumption that 'Robert is not likely to have used a work in Middle English', conclude 'the most probable hypothesis is that of a common source. It may be confidently hoped that this will come to light sooner or later (and indeed that some reader of this article may be able to identify it).'¹⁸ But no single written source has yet been identified, and the origins of the different treatments of the theme described above may have been more complex.

While the expanded lists in Robert's sermon and *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd* clearly belong to a common tradition, they do not show the kind of close and extended correspondence which would be conclusive for their use of the same written source. Since the two texts are in different languages, *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd* is composed in an ornate alliterative prose, and Robert's sermon has been transmitted as a *reportatio* (i.e. reconstructed from the listener's notes), it is not surprising that there are no close verbal correspondences, except where scriptural texts are being cited; but decisive correspondences in content are also hard to identify. The lists are very similar, but they are not identical in either their items or their order;

and although both writers use the same rhetorical framework to link their points, emphasizing that one quality on its own is not enough without others, they use it to link different points.¹⁹ Shared material in the development of the points is mainly limited to the *auctoritates* cited to support them;²⁰ but even so, most of Robert's *auctoritates* are not cited, and one *auctoritas* (1 Tim. 6:15, 'rex regum et dominus dominantium') is cited in *De Woyunge of ure Lauerd* but not by Robert.²¹ Otherwise, the resemblances are relatively few and general. What is apparently the closest parallel of content (the point that Christ was so generous that he gave himself on the cross) is probably a reminiscence of an *auctoritas* not cited by Robert but used in a similar context in *Ancrene Wisse* 7.57–8, Eph. 5:25;²² and in most cases the points are expanded differently. Indeed, the overall thrust of the argument is different, since in *De Woyunge of ure Lauerd* Christ is being compared with other suitors, in Robert's sermon with the Devil.

The variations in these and other thirteenth-century treatments of the theme discussed by Bériou and d'Avray suggest that its form was not fixed but fluid. The lists differ considerably in their number of items (from four points to nine), sometimes even within the same passage. *De Woyunge of ure Lauerd* begins by listing nine points for development but uses an eight-point structure in the development itself and the concluding summary; Robert of Sorbon in his 1261 sermon says, rather vaguely, that there are six or seven qualities which a wife should look for in a husband, and in fact goes on to discuss eight (though the eighth, *immortalitas*, strictly applies only to Christ and the Devil). Although there is a significant degree of overlap, the points themselves may vary, as may their terminology (so the kind suitor, if kindness is specified, may be *pacificus*, *benignus uxori*, *benignus et mitis*, or *non superbus*). The lists may be developed to varying degrees, using different *auctoritates* and other material; the list of seven *conditiones* in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 14947, f. 209v, is supplemented by little more than brief notes of supporting *auctoritates*, but the expanded version in Gérard of Mailly's sermon is in continuous prose, with added material including further *auctoritates*. The material in the lists may also be presented within different rhetorical frameworks (so, for example, Christ's speech in *Ancrene Wisse* Part 7 shares its use of superlatives with three of the Paris lists). Sometimes there are indications that a writer was aware of alternative formulations of the same theme, as in the annotation in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 16482, ff. 101vb–102rb, which juxtaposes two different lists of conditions, one nine-point, one six-point.

A possible explanation for these variations is that the theme of the 'conditions of eligibility' constituted what I have called elsewhere an 'inflatable

topos': that is, a list of points related to a particular theme which 'could be collapsed into its minimal form ... for easy portability, and later expanded to any size required with the help of a well-stocked memory, a few notes, and whatever reference books happened to be available'.²³ A transmission of this kind can be demonstrated for the lists of 'conditions of confession' which appear in late twelfth- and thirteenth-century pastoral literature.²⁴ These lists vary in length; they have a tendency to get longer as time goes on, but shorter lists may survive alongside longer ones because of their greater manageability. Sometimes they are recorded simply as lists (often in mnemonic hexameters); sometimes they are accompanied by brief notes of relevant *auctoritates*, *exempla* and *similitudines*; sometimes they are incorporated in more fully developed form into pastoral manuals, treatises or sermons. The materials used to expand the *topos* may travel separately from the lists, and (particularly in the case of *exempla* and *similitudines*) need not always have travelled in writing.

The tradition of the 'conditions of confession', however, differs in some respects from that of the 'conditions of eligibility'. The *topos* of the 'conditions of confession' cannot be traced back beyond the early twelfth century, and its central importance in preaching and pastoral care, particularly after the decrees on annual confession and the pastoral education of the laity issued by the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, led to at least some degree of standardization: Thomas Aquinas quotes a list of sixteen conditions 'quae a magistris assignantur' (which are assigned by the masters).²⁵ The 'conditions of eligibility' have a much longer and more complex history, and their pastoral function was less central; both factors may have contributed to their more variable thirteenth-century realizations.

The *topos* of the 'conditions of eligibility' can be traced back as far as the patristic period. One significant point of origin, identified by Bériou and d'Avray, is a passage in the early seventh-century *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville, a source sometimes explicitly acknowledged in later treatments of the theme. Isidore comments, in a chapter on marriage, 'In eligendo marito quatuor spectari solent: virtus, genus, pulchritudo, sapientia' (When choosing a husband, four things are normally looked for: courage, noble birth, good looks, and wisdom). He does not link these 'conditions of eligibility' with Christ as a lover, illustrating his points by quotation from Virgil rather than from Scripture: 'Refert haec quatuor Virgilius de Aenea, quod his Dido impulsa est in amorem ejus' (Virgil ascribes these four qualities to Aeneas, since Dido was impelled by them to love him).²⁶ There is an allegorical application of the list, however, in Rabanus Maurus' mid-ninth-century *De Universo*, an encyclopaedic compilation based on the

Etymologiae. Rabanus reinterprets Isidore's conditions, linking them to the medieval exegetical tradition of the Song of Songs:

Mystice autem viri nomine ... Christus intelligitur, qui est sponsus Ecclesiae ... Unde in Cantico Canticorum dicitur: 'Veni de Libano, sponsa mea, veni de Libano, veni' [Cant. 4:8] ... Conjugium ... spiritale, hoc est, conjunctio Christi et Ecclesiae, multa bona in se habet, quia illud, quod diximus in viro eligendo, maxime viget in Christo, hoc est, virtus et sapientia, genus et pulchritudo.

(Allegorically, however, by the term 'husband' ... Christ, who is the bridegroom of the Church, is understood ... This is why it is said in the Song of Songs, 'Come from Lebanon, my bride, come from Lebanon, come' ... Spiritual marriage, that is, the union of Christ and the Church, has many advantages, because what we said should be chosen in a husband appears in the greatest abundance in Christ, that is, courage and wisdom, noble birth and good looks.)²⁷

The point is taken further in the preamble to Honorius Augustodunensis' early twelfth-century *Expositio in Cantica Canticorum*, which offers what is effectively a seven-point list of conditions – though an idiosyncratic one – with each point supported by scriptural *auctoritates*. Here the bride of Christ is interpreted as human nature (with which Christ was united through the Incarnation). Christ satisfies the conditions required by his bride because he is well born (*Quis est dominus vester?* ... *Rex regum et Dominus dominantium* [1 Tim. 6:15]), handsome (*pulcher*), powerful (*potens*), and rich (*diues*), is honoured with gifts (*honoratus muneribus*), and has a retinue of servants (*servitus*) and a good reputation (*laus*):

Filius regis Jerusalem desponsavit sibi filiam regis Babylonis per quatuor nuntios. Quibus illa respondit. Quis est Dominus vester? at illi: Dominus noster est 'Rex regum et Dominus dominantium' [1 Tim. 6:15], Rex gloriae et princeps pacis. Et illa: Est pulcher? At illi: Ejus pulchritudinem 'sol et luna mirantur',²⁸ quia est 'speciosus forma prae filiis hominum' [Ps. 44:3], et totus desiderabilis, 'in quem angeli desiderant prospicere' [cf. 1 Pet. 1:12]. Et illa: Est potens? Et illi: 'Potestas ejus a mari usque ad mare' [Zech. 9:10]. Et illa, est dives? Et illi: 'Gloriae et divitiae in domo ejus, et torrente voluptatis potabit eos' [Ps. 111:3; 35:9]. Et illa: honoratur muneribus? At illi: 'Reges Tharsis et insulae munera offerent, reges Arabum et Saba dona adducent' [Ps. 71:10]. Et illa: Quae est ejus servitus? Et illi: 'Omnes gentes serviunt ei' [cf. Ps. 71:11]. Et illa: Quae est laus ejus? Et illi: 'Omnes gentes magnificant eum' [cf. Rom. 15:11].

His auditis, respondit, ipse Dominus vester, veniat et 'osculetur me osculo oris sui' [Cant. 1:1], et loquatur mihi, quae sibi placeant, et faciam voluntatem ejus. Rex coelestis Jerusalem est Deus, cujus filius est Christus, rex Babylonis hujus mundi est diabolus, ut scribitur: 'Princeps hujus mundi judicatus est' [John 16:11]. Hujus filia fuit humana natura, imitatione peccati facta.

(The son of the king of Jerusalem offered his hand in marriage to the daughter of the king of Babylon through four messengers, to whom she replied, 'Who is your lord?', and they answered, 'Our lord is "the king of kings and lord of lords", the king of glory and the prince of peace.' And she said: 'Is he handsome?' And they answered, 'The "sun and moon marvel" at his beauty, because he is "beautiful in appearance more than the sons of men", and wholly desirable, "on whom the angels desire to gaze".' And she said, 'Is he powerful?' And they answered, "'His power extends from sea to sea.'" And she said, 'Is he rich?' And they answered: "'Glories and riches are in his house, and he will drink them in a flood of pleasure.'" And she said: 'Is he honoured with gifts?' And they answered, "'The kings of Tharsis and the islands will offer gifts, the kings of the Arabs and Saba will bring them.'" And she said, 'What retinue of servants does he have?' And they answered: "'All nations serve him.'" And she said, 'What is his reputation?' And they answered: "'All nations glorify him.'")

On hearing this, she answered, 'Your lord may come himself and "kiss me with the kiss of his mouth", and say to me whatever he wants, and I will do his will.' The king of the heavenly Jerusalem is God, whose son is Christ; the king of the Babylon of this world is the Devil, as it is written: 'The prince of this world has been judged.' His daughter was human nature, made in the image of sin.)²⁹

Thomas the Cistercian in his commentary on the Song of Songs, completed before 1189, uses a clearly recognizable variant of Isidore's four-point list in his opening chapter: 'Quatuor sunt propter quae homines diliguntur: Potentia, sapientia, divitiae, pulchritudo. Unde Virgilius [etc.] ... Propter haec quatuor amandus est Deus' (There are four reasons why human beings are loved: power, wisdom, riches, and good looks. Hence Virgil said [etc.] ... God is to be loved on account of these four things).³⁰ He goes on to develop each point by citing scriptural *auctoritates*.

In this tradition, the conditions of eligibility are linked to the relationship between Christ and the Church, between Christ and human nature, or between God and the individual soul. But there is also a second tradition, sometimes interwoven with the first, in which Christ is seen specifically as the husband of the vowed virgin. This can be traced back to the pseudo-Ambrosian 'Passion of St Agnes', which was probably composed before the end of the seventh century, since it is echoed by Aldhelm (d. c.710) in his prose treatise *De Virginitate*. The *Passio* includes a rhetorical speech in which Agnes tells her rejected earthly suitor,

Discede a me; quia jam ab alio amatore praeventa sum ... longe te nobilior et genere et dignitate... .. Non ergo potero ad contumeliam prioris amatoris vel aspicere alium et illum relinquere, cum quo sum charitate devincta; cujus est generositas celsior, possibilitas fortior, aspectus pulchrior, amor suavior, et omni

gratia elegantior ... Cujus mater virgo est, cujus pater feminam nescit; cui angeli serviunt, cujus pulchritudinem sol et luna mirantur, cujus odore reviviscunt mortui, cujus tactu confortantur infirmi, cujus opes numquam deficiunt, cujusque divitiae numquam decrescunt. Ipsi soli servo fidem meam, ipsi me tota devotione committo. Quem cum amavero, casta sum: cum tetigero, munda sum: cum accepero, virgo sum.

(Leave me; because I have already been chosen by another lover ... far nobler than you in family and rank ... For I cannot insult my first lover, to whom I am bound by love, by looking at another man or leaving him; whose birth is higher, whose power is greater, whose appearance is more handsome, whose love is sweeter, and more pleasing in every grace ... whose mother is a virgin, whose father knows no woman; whom the angels serve, whose beauty the sun and moon wonder at, by whose fragrance the dead revive, by whose touch the sick are comforted, whose resources never fail, and whose riches never decrease. I keep my faith for him alone, I commit myself to him with complete devotion. When I love him I am chaste; when I touch him I am pure; when I accept him I am a virgin.)³¹

Agnes's speech lists, like those treatments of the theme based on Isidore, the qualities which make a lover desirable: high birth (*generositas*), power (*possibilitas*), good looks (*aspectus pulcher*) and charm ('amor suavis, et omni gratia elegans'); but in this strand of the tradition there is a sharper contrast between the earthly and heavenly suitor. Not only is there a marked difference in degree (*longe ... nobilior, celsior, fortior, pulchrior, suavior, elegantior*), but a difference in kind ('cujus odore reviviscunt mortui'), and even an opposition, implied by the threefold paradox 'Quem cum amavero, casta sum: cum tetigero, munda sum: cum accepero, virgo sum.'

Both traditions are drawn on in a sermon on the Epiphany preached to an audience of monks by the Cistercian Helinand of Froidmont (c.1160–post 1229), taking as its text the antiphon 'Hodie coelesti Sponso juncta est Ecclesia' (Today the Church is united with her heavenly Bridegroom). An acknowledged borrowing from Isidore ('Porro in eligendo marito, juxta praefatum Isidorum, quatuor solent inquiri, virtus et genus, mores et sapientia' (And in choosing a husband, according to the aforesaid Isidore, four things are normally looked for, virtue and high birth, good morals and wisdom) is followed by the development of a six-point list of conditions of eligibility – virtue, riches, good looks, wisdom, high birth and gentleness (*suavitas morum*) – interweaving scriptural *auctoritates* with material from Agnes' speech in the 'Passion of St Agnes':

Porro sponsus Ecclesiae Christus tantae virtutis est, ut ad ejus tactum convalescant languidi, ad ejus odorem reviviscant mortui, ad illius clamorem exsiliant

sepulti ... O quam dives est, cujus est terra, et plenitudo ejus, orbis terrarum, et qui habitant in eo [Ps. 23:1]! ... O quam pulcher, cujus pulchritudinem sol et luna mirantur! in quem desiderant angeli prospicere [1 Pet. 1:12]. O quam sapiens, qui comprehendit sapientes in astutia eorum, qui perdit sapientiam sapientum, et prudentiam prudentium reprobatur! [Job 5:13] ... Generositas autem ejus tam enarrari non potest, quam ipsa generatio. 'Generationem', inquit, 'ejus quis enarrabit?' [Isa. 53:8] ... At suavitatem morum ejus quis explicet: quam certe nec ipse melius aut plenius explicare potuit, quam cum dixit: 'Deliciae meae esse cum filiis hominum'? [Prov. 8:31]. Quid ad hoc dicis, o sponsa ...? Ecce habes sponsum ... quem cum amaveris, casta es; cum tetigeris munda es; cum acceperis virgo es; cum illi nupseris, felix es.

(Furthermore, Christ, the bridegroom of the Church, is of such virtue that the weak recover their strength at his touch, the dead are revived by his fragrance, the buried leap up at his call ... Oh, how rich he is, who owns the earth and its plenty, the world and those who live in it! Oh, how beautiful he is, whose beauty the sun and moon wonder at, on whom the angels desire to gaze. Oh, how wise he is, who understands the wise in their cunning, who destroys the wisdom of the wise, and condemns the prudence of the prudent! ... And his high birth can no more be described than his lineage. He says 'Who will relate his lineage?' ... And who can describe his sweetness of manners, which certainly even he himself could not describe better and more fully than when he said, 'My delight is to be with the children of men'? What do you, the bride, say to this? Behold, you have such a bridegroom ... that when you love him, you are chaste; when you touch him, you are pure; when you accept him, you are a virgin; when you marry him, you are blessed.)³²

Although the *topos* seems to have evolved within a primarily monastic context, by Helinand's time it was already beginning to be disseminated to a wider, extra-monastic audience. It is likely that this development took place in late twelfth-century Paris, where monastic culture coexisted with the culture of the schools, and a number of scholars, particularly in the circle of Peter Cantor, were beginning to take an active interest in popular preaching. There is some evidence for it in the work of Alan of Lille – who himself occupied an intermediate position between the two cultures, teaching in the Paris schools but entering the monastery at Cîteaux before his death in 1203. His *Summa de Arte Praedicatoria*, a precursor of the much more numerous preaching aids of the thirteenth century, includes among its model *Sermones ad Status* a sermon *Ad Virgines* which includes a five-point list of 'conditions of eligibility', accompanied by *auctoritates*: the bloom of youth (*juventutis flos*), riches (*divitiae*), good looks (*pulchritudo*), high birth (*generis nobilitas*) and earthly reputation or status (*mundanus honor, vel terrena dignitas*). All but the first are paralleled in Isidore's list,

but Alan also draws on the 'Passion of St Agnes' for one of his *auctoritates*, and the rhetorical point he is making is similar (the audience are urged to choose a heavenly rather than an earthly husband):

O virgo, si terrestri viro nubere vis, propter juventutis florem, considera quia illum florem aut mors decerpit, aut saltem in hieme senectutis efflorescit [*sic*, for 'deflorescit'?]. Nube ergo illi viro qui solus habet immortalitatem, 'apud quem non est transmutatio, nec vicissitudinis obumbratio' [Jas. 1:17]. Si vis nubere terrestri marito propter divitias, considera quod terrenae divitiae fallaces sunt et transitoriae, quia aut in praesenti vita transeunt, aut saltem in morte recedunt. Nube ergo illi, apud quem thesauri sunt incomparabiles, et divitiae immutabiles; quas nec fur furatur, nec tinea demolitur [Matt. 6:20]. Si autem vis nubere terrestri viro, quia pulchritudine insignitur, considera quia pulchritudinem aut infirmitas extenuat, aut senectus exstirpat, aut saltem articulus mortis exterminat. Nube ergo illi, 'cujus pulchritudinem sol et luna mirantur'. Si vis nubere terrestri viro, propter generis nobilitatem, nube illi de quo dicitur: 'Generationem ejus quis enarrabit?' [Isa. 53:8]. Si vis nubere terrestri marito propter mundanum honorem, vel terrenam dignitatem, considera quia summis negatum est stare diu, nimisque graves sub pondere lapsus. Nube ergo illi de quo dicitur: 'Potestati ejus quis resistit?' [cf. Rom. 9:19, 13:2]. Et alibi: 'Regni ejus non erit finis' [Luke 1:33].

(O virgin, if you wish to marry an earthly man for the sake of the bloom of youth, consider that either death plucks that bloom, or at the very least it withers [?] in the winter of old age. Therefore, marry that one husband who has immortality, 'with whom there is no change or overshadowing of vicissitude'. If you wish to marry an earthly husband for the sake of money, consider that earthly riches are deceptive and transitory, since either they are lost in this life, or at any rate vanish at death. Therefore, marry him whose treasures are incomparable, and whose riches unchangeable, which no thief steals, or moth devours. And if you wish to marry an earthly man because he is remarkable for his good looks, consider that illness diminishes them, or old age removes them, or else the moment of death destroys them. Therefore marry him 'whose beauty the sun and moon admire'. If you wish to marry an earthly man on account of his nobility of birth, marry him of whom it is said: 'Who will relate his lineage?' If you wish to marry an earthly husband on account of worldly honour or earthly status, consider that it is not possible even for the highest to stand for long, and falls are heavier under too great a weight. Therefore marry him of whom it is said, 'Who can resist his power?' And elsewhere: 'There will be no end to his kingdom.')³³

A modified version of this passage resurfaces in the vernacular in another work of the Ancrene Wisse Group, *Epistel of Meidenhad* ('*Hali Meidhad*'), which is partly based on Alan's model sermon:³⁴

Nu þenne, seli meiden, ʒef þe is weole leof, nim þe him to lauer[d] þet wealdeð al þet is ant wes ant eauer schal iwurðen ... ʒef þet tu wilnest were þe muche wlite habbe, nim him of hwas wlite beoð awundret of þe sunne ant te mone, upo hwas nebscheft þe engles ne beoð neauer fulle to bihalden ... ʒef þe were leof streon, nim þe to him under hwam þu schalt i þi meiðhad temen dehtren ant sunen of gasteliche teames ... þet beoð þe uertuz þet he streoneð in þe þurh his swete grace.

(Now then, innocent maiden, if you are fond of wealth, take him as your lord who possesses all that is and was and ever shall be ... If you want a husband who is very handsome, take him whose beauty the sun and moon admire, whose face the angels are never weary of gazing at ... If you would like children, devote yourself to him with whom you shall, in your virginity, give birth to spiritual sons and daughters ... which are the virtues that he engenders in you through his sweet grace.)³⁵

Bériou and d'Avray argue that the extension of the *topos* from a monastic to an extra-monastic audience further modified the nature of the *topos* itself. They see some thirteenth-century lists of the 'conditions of eligibility' as drawing also on secular tradition, specifically the recently-developed genre of courtly romance, for a set of values which would appeal directly to a lay audience. Bériou and d'Avray list the qualities that make a knight desirable in Chrétien de Troyes's late twelfth-century romances (he is handsome (*bel*), valiant (*proz*), of noble birth (*haut parage*), generous (*larges*), kind and gentle (*deboneire*), wise (*sage*) and courteous (*cortois*)), and point out that six of these qualities can be paralleled in Robert de Sorbon's list (*pulcher, fortis e poichanz, generosus, largus, pacificus* and *sapiens*). Their argument as it stands is not conclusive; four of the six parallels in Robert, as they note, also have antecedents in Isidore's much earlier list (*pulchritudo, virtus, genus, sapientia*), Robert does not present *largus* and *pacificus* as specifically courtly qualities, and he does not mention what would have been the decisive quality, courtesy.³⁶ The influence of courtly values can be more easily demonstrated, however, for the Middle English lists. The lists in *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd* and *Ancrene Wisse* Part 7 both specify courtesy (*hendeleic*), and *debonairte/deboneirschipe* is also mentioned as a desirable quality in the *Wohunge* list.³⁷ The immediate context of the two lists confirms this courtly influence: *Ancrene Wisse* Part 7 includes the earliest recorded use of the allegorized *exemplum* of Christ as a lover-knight, which was used widely in later English and continental popular preaching,³⁸ and *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd* similarly presents Christ as the knightly defender and wooer of the soul:

Iesu, swete Iesu, þus tu faht for me aʒaines mine sawle fan; þu me derennedes wið like, and makedes of me, wrecche, þi leofmon and spuse. Broht tu haues me fra þe world to bur of þi burðe, steked me i chaumbre; I mai þer þe swa sweteli kissen and cluppen, and of þi luue haue gastli likinge.

(Jesus, sweet Jesus, in this way you fought for me against the enemies of my soul; you defended me with your body, and made me, a wretch, into your lover and wife. You have brought me from the world to the bower of your birth, shut me in a chamber; there I can kiss and embrace you so sweetly, and take spiritual pleasure in your love.)³⁹

The way in which the thirteenth-century lists are used, however, varies considerably according to their social and institutional context. Although both the works of the *Ancrene Wisse* Group cited above and the Paris marriage sermons discussed by Bériou and d'Avray were composed for extra-monastic audiences, the nature and concerns of these audiences differed considerably, and are addressed in different ways.

The audience of the Paris sermons, though extra-monastic, was not necessarily lay; according to Bériou and d'Avray, 'an audience of academics cannot be ruled out' for Robert of Sorbon's 1261 sermon, although the elements of the vernacular included in its *reportatio* suggest vernacular preaching, 'either to a university audience on an unofficial occasion, or to an audience including laypeople', and Adam le Picard's sermon was delivered before the University in 1282.⁴⁰ These sermons, however, address the concerns of the laity, presenting marriage as a positive good, and this influences their treatment of the 'conditions of eligibility'. In the examples described by Bériou and d'Avray, the main application of these conditions is to the union of Christ with the individual soul. Although some contemporary preachers on marriage mention the special relationship of Christ with vowed religious,⁴¹ union with Christ is not necessarily presented as an alternative to earthly marriage. A list of 'conditions of eligibility' for women, including virginity, is sometimes applied in marriage sermons to the bride of Christ; but the Franciscan Guibert of Tournai recommends only that the bride of Christ should be '*casta quoad carnis aut saltem mentis integritatem*' ('chaste in the integrity of her flesh or at least of her mind'),⁴² and other preachers interpret the requirement of virginity figuratively rather than literally, emphasizing the importance of purity of spirit.⁴³ Robert of Sorbon's sermon emphasises that spiritual union with Christ is open to any good Christian; it is the marriage '*anime cuiuslibet fidelis ad filium Dei, Ihesum Christum. Sponsus est Christus, sponsa, sancta et fidelis anima*' (of any faithful soul to the son of God, Jesus Christ. The husband is Christ, the

wife, the holy and faithful soul).⁴⁴ Earthly marriage is used primarily as an analogy to explain more vividly the nature of the relationship between Christ and the soul; Adam Picard in his sermon says of spiritual marriage, ‘*sicut in matrimonio carnali sunt quedam conditiones in sponso et sponsa requisite ... ita contingit in hiis nuptiis spiritualibus*’⁴⁵ (*just as in carnal marriage there are some conditions required of husband and wife ... so it is the case in these spiritual nuptials*). Where a contrast is drawn between two different types of union it is the Devil, not an earthly husband, who is cast as a rival suitor.

In those works of the *Ancrene Wisse* group which use the *topos* of the ‘conditions of eligibility’, the internal evidence suggests a different kind of audience with different concerns, and the *topos* is modified accordingly. *Be Wohunge of ure Lauerd* is a meditation composed for use by an anchoress;⁴⁶ the original version of *Ancrene Wisse* was addressed to three sisters who, the author tells us, had renounced the world in the bloom of their youth to become anchoresses;⁴⁷ and *Hali Meiðhad* addresses, more generally, virgins who had either entered or were thinking of entering the religious life.⁴⁸ The address to the three sisters in *Ancrene Wisse* tells us that they were *gentile* (well-born) women who had entered the anchorhold directly from the world (i.e. they were what Ann K. Warren calls ‘lay anchoresses’, rather than ‘nun anchoresses’ who had previously been members of a religious community⁴⁹); an audience of this kind may help to explain the courtly colouring of the lists in *Ancrene Wisse* and *Be Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, as well as the inclusion of other courtly elements in these works. But although the women addressed may have come from a secular background, they had either renounced marriage or were considering renouncing it, and this also influences the way in which the ‘conditions of eligibility’ are used.

The use of the ‘conditions’ in *Hali Meiðhad* is based on a passage in Alan of Lille’s model sermon *Ad Virgines* which begins ‘O virgo, si terrestri viro nubere vis ...’, a clause repeated with minor variations for each of Alan’s five points (see p. 37). In *Hali Meiðhad* the passage provides the climax of a lengthy dissuasion from marriage, and although it is followed by a warning against adultery with the Devil through pride, the primary contrast being drawn is between Christ and an earthly husband.

Similarly, in *Be Wohunge of ure Lauerd* the emphasis is on the contrast between human and divine eligibility, expressed through a semi-formulaic use of *if*-clauses (as in Alan’s model sermon) in four of the first seven conditions: e.g. ‘*Þa 3if þat I wile ani mon for feirnesse luue, luue I wile þe, mi leue lif, moder sune feirest*’ (Then if I want to love any man for good looks,

I will love you, my dear life, the most handsome of men).⁵⁰ The speaker is represented as renouncing all earthly ties: 'for-þi is riht þet I luue þe, and leaue alle oðre for þe' (therefore it is right that I should love you, and forsake all others for you).⁵¹ The Devil does not figure as an individual in the first section of the work, on the 'conditions of eligibility', where Christ is shown as fighting an undifferentiated army of 'ahefulle deueles';⁵² and in the second section he is presented as threatening rather than seductive, allied with the world and the flesh to drag the speaker into hell.⁵³

In *Ancrene Wisse* Part 7, the focus is also on the the relationship between human and divine love, but its treatment is more complex, progressing from comparison through contrast to opposition. The allegory of Christ as lover-knight⁵⁴ ingeniously assimilates divine love to earthly romantic love, focusing on the analogies between Christ and knight rather than the differences. But when the author moves on to discuss the four chief loves found in this world, 'bitweone gode iferen; bitweone mon ant wummon; bi[tweone] wif ant hire child; bitweone licome ant sawle' (between good friends; between man and woman; between a woman and her child; between body and soul),⁵⁵ he emphasizes the difference in degree between these loves and Christ's love: 'Þus lo, Iesu Cristes luue toward his deore spuse – þet is, Hali Chirche oþer cleane sawle – passeð alle ant ouerkimeð þe fowr measte luuen þet me ifind on eorðe' (So you see that Jesus Christ's love towards his dear bride – that is, Holy Church or the pure soul – surpasses all these and overcomes the four greatest loves to be found on earth).⁵⁶ Towards the end of Part 7 his emphasis shifts again, to the difference in kind between earthly and heavenly love. For those who have entered the religious life, the only alternatives are 'stinkinde flesches luue' (stinking carnal love) and 'gastelich luue' (spiritual love); the anchoress must choose 'euchan of þeos twa, eorðlich elne ant heouenlich, to hweðer ha wule halden, for þet oðer ha mot leten; for i þe tweire monglunge ne mei ha habben neauer mare schirnesse of heorte, þet is ... þet god ant te strengðe of alle religiuns, ant in euch ordre' (which of these two, earthly and heavenly comfort, she wants to settle for, since she must give up the other; because if she mixes the two she can never again have purity of heart, which is ... the virtue and the strength of all religious ways of life, and of every order).⁵⁷ The passage on the 'conditions of eligibility' follows on from the discussion of the four chief loves ('Wið al þis luue hetten he woheð hire o þis wise ...' (With all this love he still wooes her in this way ...)),⁵⁸ and shares its intermediate status between comparison and opposition, using its repeated superlatives to present Christ's love as better in degree than anything that an earthly lover could offer. The *spuse* in this

passage is defined generally as ‘Hali Chirche oper cleane sawle’ rather than as the vowed virgin, but the author also singles out the importance of chastity as a prerequisite for loving Christ: Christ tells the anchoress ‘Þus alle þe reisuns hwi me ah to ȝeoue luue þu maht ifinden in me, nomeliche ȝef þu luuest chaste cleanness; for nan ne mei luuie me bute ha hire halde’ (So you can find in me all the reasons why love should be given, especially if you love chaste purity; because nobody can love me unless she preserves it).⁵⁹ This stress on *chaste cleanness* clearly worried at least one thirteenth-century user, presumably because it could be read as referring only to virgins; an addition of uncertain authority, found only in the text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402 and in the Latin translation of *Ancrene Wisse*, qualifies it with cautious orthodoxy, ‘ah ha is þreouald: i widewehad; i pushad; i meidenhad, þe heste’ (but there are three kinds: in widowhood, in marriage, and in virginity, the highest).⁶⁰

Bernard of Clairvaux begins his first sermon on the Song of Songs by telling his audience of monks, ‘Vobis, fratres, alia quam aliis de saeculo, aut certe aliter dicenda sunt’ (To you, brothers, other things should be said than to others who live in the world, or at any rate in other ways).⁶¹ The thirteenth-century uses of the *topos* of the ‘conditions of eligibility’ reflect a similar awareness of the need to make adjustments of content and style for different audiences, and the different strands in its development allowed for considerable variations in emphasis. The Paris preachers discussed by Bériou and d’Avray, focusing on the theme of marriage in an urban environment where the audience might include both clerics and laity, draw primarily on the strand of the tradition going back through Rabanus Maurus to Isidore, treating earthly marriage as an analogue of spiritual marriage, and emphasizing the possibility of union with Christ for any Christian soul. The *Ancrene Wisse* Group works discussed above address a different type of audience, women who had chosen, following St Paul’s recommendation in 1 Cor. 7:32–4, to ‘liuien on eorðe wið meidhod and ine clenness of soule and of bodie boðe’ (live on earth in virginity and in purity of both soul and body);⁶² here the approach is closer to that of the ‘Passion of St Agnes’, treating earthly and spiritual marriage as alternative choices and emphasizing the superiority of Christ as lover.

In spite of these variations, however, it is clear that the Paris sermons and the works of the *Ancrene Wisse* Group are drawing on a common tradition of ‘conditions of eligibility’; and the resemblances are close enough to suggest, if not a single written source, at least a single milieu where the *topos* developed the features shared by both groups of works. In the case of *Epistel of Meidenhad*, there is a direct debt to Alan of Lille’s *Summa de*

Arte Praedicatoria, showing an awareness of recent innovations in preaching methods in the Paris schools. The parallels in *Ancrene Wisse* with late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century pastoral literature composed in Paris point to a continuing connection.⁶³ Given the tendency of lists of this kind to lengthen as time went on, the seven-point list of 'conditions of eligibility' in *Ancrene Wisse* and the eight- or nine-point list in *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd* are likely to represent later stages of the evolution of the *topos* than Alan of Lille's five-point list, which would place their appearance in the early thirteenth rather than the late twelfth century.

The tentative history of the *topos* of the 'conditions of eligibility' that I have traced here may help to cast some light on the very imperfectly documented cultural and institutional context of *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd*. Most discussion of the sources of *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd* has concentrated on its relationship to monastic literature of the twelfth century and earlier,⁶⁴ and there is no doubt that an earlier monastic tradition underlies its treatment of the 'conditions of eligibility'; but the form in which it presents them indicates that its author was also influenced by contemporary developments in preaching in the Paris schools.

Notes

¹ *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, ll. 8–13. All line-references are to *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, EETS OS 241, ed. W. Meredith Thompson (London: Oxford University Press, 1958); but since it is a diplomatic edition, I have modernized punctuation and word-spacing and expanded abbreviations. Translations are my own.

² Nicole Bériou and D. L. d'Avray, 'The image of the ideal husband in thirteenth century France', in *Modern Questions about Medieval Sermons: Essays on Marriage, Death, History and Sanctity*, Biblioteca di Medioevo Latino 11, ed. Nicole Bériou and David L. d'Avray (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1994), pp. 31–69.

³ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 15971, ff. 147vb–148rb; the extract is edited and translated by Bériou and d'Avray, 'The image of the ideal husband', pp. 33–6 (translation), 58–61 (text).

⁴ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 14947, ff. 209rb–210rb; the extract is edited by Bériou and d'Avray, 'The image of the ideal husband', pp. 61–4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁶ Gérard's sermon is edited and translated in D. L. d'Avray, *Medieval Marriage Sermons: Mass Communication in a Culture without Print* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 227–73; an extract is edited in Bériou and d'Avray, 'The image of the ideal husband', pp. 65–7.

- ⁷ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 16482, ff. 101vb–102rb, edited in Bériou and d’Avray, ‘The image of the ideal husband’, pp. 67–9.
- ⁸ *Wohunge*, 13–31.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 30–1.
- ¹⁰ *Ancrene Wisse*, 7.184–92. All references are to the text in Bella Millett (ed.), *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402, with Variants from other Manuscripts*, vol. 1, EETS os 325 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), by part and line-number; translations are mine.
- ¹¹ It is possible that it should be aligned with Christ’s kindness; the anchoresses are advised to be ‘swete ant swote iheortet’ (sweet and fragrant in heart) rather than bitter and angry at *Ancrene Wisse* 3.3, and an earlier Latin treatment of the theme by Helinand of Froidmont mentions Christ’s *suauitas morum* (see pp. 35–6). But the Latin translation has *suauissimus et dulcissimus* rather than echoing the scriptural *mitis et humilis corde* (Matt. 11:29) cited in the Paris lists, and it is possible that the phrase should be taken at face value, as a reference to Christ’s sweet taste and fragrance; the imagery has scriptural precedents (e.g. Cant. 5:13, 16), and can also found in some other *Ancrene Wisse* Group works (see S. R. T. O. d’Ardenne and E. J. Dobson (eds), *Seinte Katerine*, EETS ss 7 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), ll. 228, 559–60 (edited text), Frances M. Mack (ed.), *Seinte Marharete, þe Meiden ant Martyr*, EETS os 193 (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1934), 10/25–6, 26/11–12, and *Epistel of Meidenhad*, in Millett (ed.), *Hali Meidhad*, 14/7–9). It is also paralleled in the ‘Passion of St Agnes’ (see pp. 34–5), which refers to Christ’s *odor* and describes his love as *suavis*.
- ¹² Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 15971, f. 148rb, ed. and trans. in Bériou and d’Avray, ‘The image of the ideal husband’, pp. 35, 60.
- ¹³ *Ancrene Wisse*, 7.48–59.
- ¹⁴ Bériou and d’Avray, ‘The image of the ideal husband’, p. 40.
- ¹⁵ See Millett (ed.), *Ancrene Wisse*, vol. 1, pp. xxiii–xxiv.
- ¹⁶ See *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. xiii.
- ¹⁷ On the controversial question of the dating of *Ancrene Wisse*, see Bella Millett, *Ancrene Wisse, The Katherine Group, and the Wooing Group*, Annotated Bibliographies of Old and Middle English Literature 2 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), pp. 6–13.
- ¹⁸ Bériou and d’Avray, ‘The image of the ideal husband’, p. 40.
- ¹⁹ Robert argues that good looks are not enough without strength, that both are not enough without riches, and that all three must be accompanied by noble birth; the *Wohunge* author that riches must be accompanied by generosity, and generosity by wisdom.
- ²⁰ Robert’s reference to 1 Pet. 1:12, ‘quae desiderant angeli prospicere’, is paralleled in *Wohunge* 37–8, ‘al engles lif is ti neb to bihalden’; of Ps. 23:8, ‘Dominus fortis et potens’, in *Wohunge* 148–51 (which also echoes the second half of the verse), ‘for-þi of þe, mi lefmon, was soðliche quiddet, “Drihti[n] is mahti, strong, and kene i fihte”’; of Ps. 23:1, ‘Domini est terra, etc.’, in *Wohunge* 63–7, ‘for as te hali prophete Dauid cwiddes, Drihtines is te eorðe and al þat hit fulles, werld and al þat

- trin wunēð; of Ps. 8:8, 'omnia subiecisti', in *Wohunge* 83–4, 'For first þu mades al þis world and dides hit under mine fet'; and of Col. 2:3, 'in quo sunt omnes thesauri sapientiae ... absconditi', in *Wohunge* 115–17, 'Inwið þe, mi leue lif, is hord of alle wisdom hid, as te bok witnesses.'
- ²¹ *Wohunge*, 171–2, 'king ouer kinges, lauerd ouer lauerdes' (cf. the passage from Honorius Augustodunensis cited on p. 33).
- ²² See p. 30.
- ²³ Bella Millett, 'Ancrene Wisse and the conditions of confession', *English Studies*, 80 (1999), 193–215 (p. 205).
- ²⁴ E.g. the list in *Ancrene Wisse* 5.65–7, which the author goes on to develop at length: 'Schrift schal beo wreiful, bitter mid sorhe, ihal, naket, ofte imaket, hihful, eadmod, scheomeful, [dredful ant] hopeful, wis, soð, ant willes, ahne ant studeuest, biþoht biuore longe' (Confession must be accusatory, bitter with regret, complete, naked, frequently made, prompt, humble, made with shame, fear and hope, discreet, truthful and voluntary, one's own and resolute, and well thought out beforehand). For a fuller discussion of the tradition to which this list belongs, see Millett, 'Ancrene Wisse and the conditions of confession'.
- ²⁵ See Millett, 'Ancrene Wisse and the conditions of confession', p. 201.
- ²⁶ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, bk. 9, ch. 7, § 28, *PL* 82.367–8.
- ²⁷ Rabanus Maurus, *De Universo*, bk. 7, ch. 5, *PL* 111.193.
- ²⁸ An echo of the 'Passion of St Agnes'; see p. 35.
- ²⁹ Honorius Augustodunensis, *Expositio in Cantica Canticorum*, Tractatus 1, *PL* 172.357–8.
- ³⁰ Thomas the Cistercian, *Commentarii in Cantica Canticorum*, *PL* 206.47–8.
- ³¹ *PL* 17.736.
- ³² Helinand of Froidmont, sermon 5, *In Epiphania Domini* 2, *PL* 212.527–8.
- ³³ Alan of Lille, *Summa de arte praedicatoria*, ch. 47, *PL* 210.195.
- ³⁴ See Bella Millett (ed.), *Hali Meiðhad*, EETS os 284 (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. xlviii–li. I have used the thirteenth-century title in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 34 (see note 48 below) in the text of the article rather than the traditional editorial title, 'Hali Meiðhad'.
- ³⁵ Bella Millett (ed.), *Hali Meiðhad*, 20/5–19; translation from Bella Millett and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (eds), *Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group and Ancrene Wisse*, rev. edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 34/33–36/11.
- ³⁶ Bériou and d'Avray suggest that it may have been omitted because 'the courtly knight is in a sense subservient to his lady, and Robert may have felt that this would distort the analogy with the relation of Christ to the soul' ('The image of the ideal husband', p. 46).
- ³⁷ *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd* 29 (*debonairte*), 210 (*deboneirschipe*). *Deboneirté* is also attributed to Christ in *Ancrene Wisse* Part 7 in the courtly context of the allegory of the lover-knight, 7. 81–3: 'Ah swa þurh his deboneirte luue hefde ouercumen him ...' (But love had overcome him so much because of his gentle nature ...).
- ³⁸ See Wilbur Gaffney, 'The allegory of the Christ-knight in *Piers Plowman*', *PMLA*, 46 (1931), 155–68 (more comprehensive than its title might suggest, covering con-

tinental as well as English versions), and Rosemary Woolf, 'The theme of Christ the lover-knight in medieval English literature', *Review of English Studies*, NS 13 (1962), 1–16.

³⁹ *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, 568–77. The form *derennedes* in this passage (from AN *dereiner*) is the earliest recorded use of the verb, by almost a century, in Middle English. It is also used in the note added to Adam Picard's sermon in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 14947, under the condition of eligibility 'quod sit facundus' (that he should be eloquent), where it seems to be used in the sense of legal advocacy: 'je desraine bien mon droit' (I defend my right well). But the writer adds 'et me combat pour sauver les ames' (and fight to save souls), translating the *auctoritas* Isa. 63.1, 'Ego qui loquor iustitiam et propugnator ad saluandum', and the phrase in *Wohunge* 'wið like' (with your body, physically) suggests that the *Wohunge* author has in mind the specific sense 'to maintain or vindicate (a right, claim, etc.), by wager of battle' (*OED* s.v. *deraign* 1.). Cf. *Wohunge* 123–7, 142–4, 'And is ani swa hardi swa ar tu? Nai, for þu þe ane dreddes nawt wið þin ahne deore bodi to fihte azaines þe ahefulle deueles of helle ... þu, kene kidde kempe, robbedes helle hus' (And is anyone as brave as you are? No, because you alone were not afraid to fight against the terrifying devils of hell with your own dear body ... you, a bold and renowned champion, despoiled the house of hell).

⁴⁰ See Bériou and d'Avray, 'The image of the ideal husband', pp. 38–9.

⁴¹ See, e.g., d'Avray, *Medieval Marriage Sermons*, pp. 110–17 (Peter of Rheims), 186–7 (John of La Rochelle) and 212–15 (Peter of Saint-Benoît).

⁴² See d'Avray, *Medieval Marriage Sermons*, pp. 306–7 (my italics).

⁴³ E.g. Hugh of St Cher's explanation, 'Sciendum est quod oportet te esse uirginem, id est, incorruptum uel incorruptam, si uis esse sponsa Christi' (You should know that you must be a virgin, that is, an uncorrupted man or woman, if you wish to be a bride of Christ), and Gérard of Mailly's discussion of the same theme; see d'Avray, *Medieval Marriage Sermons*, pp. 160–1 and 264–7.

⁴⁴ Bériou and d'Avray, 'The image of the ideal husband', p. 59 (my translation and italics).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 62 (my italics).

⁴⁶ See *Wohunge*, 585–95, 645–58.

⁴⁷ The passage is found in full only in one manuscript, London, British Library, Cotton Nero A.xiv, but the evidence of the textual tradition suggests that it was in the original form of the work; see Millett (ed.), *Ancrene Wisse*, vol. 1, pp. xxxvii–xxxviii and lvii, and footnote to *Ancrene Wisse* 4.192.

⁴⁸ The title given in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 34, *Epistel of Meidenhad meidene froure*, is ambiguous: is it a work for the 'comfort' of virgins, or for their 'encouragement'? It might, of course, serve for both.

⁴⁹ See Ann K. Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons in Medieval England* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 22–9.

⁵⁰ *Wohunge*, 52–5; also 90–2 (generosity), 109–12 (wisdom), 151–3 (courage). Similar points, but differently formulated, are made at *Wohunge*, 57–9 and 71–7 (riches), 180–2 (nobility), and 210–15 (kindness).

⁵¹ *Wohunge*, 212–13; cf. *Wohunge*, 242–51 on the speaker's renunciation of family ties, 'leaued haue I for þi luue flesches sibnesse ...' (I have given up for your love the kinship of the flesh ...).

- ⁵² Ibid., 122–51.
- ⁵³ See *ibid.*, 122–58, 269–308.
- ⁵⁴ *Ancrene Wisse*, 7.59–127.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., 7.128–30.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 7.180–2.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., 7.321–5.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., 7.182–3.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 7.191–3.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 7.193–4.
- ⁶¹ *Sermones in Cantica Canticorum*, Sermon 1, § 1, in Jean Leclercq, Charles H. Talbot and Henri-Marie Rochais (eds), *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, vol. 1, p. 3 (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957).
- ⁶² The quotation is from another *Ancrene Wisse* Group work, *On Lofsong of ure Louerde*, 86–8 (ed. Thompson, *De Woyunge of ure Lauerd*, p. 12).
- ⁶³ See Geoffrey Shepherd (ed.), *Ancrene Wisse Parts 6 and 7* [1959], rev. edn (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1991), pp. xxviii–xxix, and Millett, 'Ancrene Wisse and the conditions of confession'.
- ⁶⁴ See W. Meredith Thompson (ed.), *De Woyunge of ure Lauerd*, pp. xiii–xxii, and Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson (trans. and introd.), *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works*, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1991), p. 246.

Speaking of Flesh and Soul: Linguistic and Spiritual Translation in the Wooing Group

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One of the pleasures of reading and studying the Wooing Group is the power of the imagery and language to paint a clear, vivid image of the action of the texts. Whether it is the repetition about daily prayers, activities or eating and sleeping habits of *Ancrene Wisse* or the stunning re-enactment of the Passion in *Pe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, the author(s) of these works provide an almost cinematic visual performance of the life, faith and desire of the anchorite. The reader is frequently reminded of the fleshly nature of sin and the fallen status of those who do not fulfil the expectations of the author, and she is provided with many examples of sinful figures and their hellish fates, so that she can visualize the outcome of her behaviour, both good and bad. Christ is described very physically, his ‘body white under clothing’ and the brutality of his suffering and death. The anchorite herself is provided with examples of each of the senses through which sin can occur, and both the love of God and the sorrow of the fallen Lucifer are described in colourful, vibrant language. This may be the case because medieval people were so much more focused on images than on texts and were used to such powerful depictions with respect to saints’ lives and biblical narratives. It is also true that English Christian spirituality, going back at least as far as the late Anglo-Saxon period and extending well into the Renaissance, was always very vivid and descriptive and sensual in nature. The *Dream of the Rood*, for example, recounts a mystical vision of the Cross, almost simultaneously adorned with jewels and bleeding, ‘drenching’ the dreamer:

Geseah Ic wuldres treow

Wærum geweorðode, wynnum scinan,
 Gegyred mid golde; gimmas hæfdon
 Berigene weorðlice wealdes treow.
 Hwæðre, Ic þurh þæt gold ongytan meahte
 Earmra ærgewin, þæt hit ærest ongan
 Swætan on þa swiðran healfe. Eall Ic wæs mid sorgum gedrefed.

(I saw the tree of glory / honoured with garments, shining with joys, / covered with gold; gems had / covered magnificently the tree of the forest. / Nevertheless, I was able to perceive through that gold / the ancient hostility of wretches, so that it first began / to bleed on the right side. I was all drenched with sorrows.)¹

It may, however, also be true that anchoritic literature must be excessive in its sensual depictions of both sin and salvation due to the sensual deprivation inherent in the anchoritic life. A person enclosed in a space as small as seven feet by four feet,² with little light, curtained windows, and restrictions on conversation and sight, would have felt very deprived and would, without some form of mental exercise, have probably gone mad. It is perhaps not surprising that the texts associated with these figures provide such powerful visual images and lead the reader (medieval and modern) to flights of fancy and even to emotional excess.

In discussing medieval mysticism there are many manners by which these texts and their authors translate,³ are translated, and can offer a kind of spiritual translation. Although the subject of linguistic translation is the means by which we most often approach this genre, that is, decoding and re-encoding the meaning of a text through language, other forms of translation persist. The physical, tactile sense of translation refers to what the *Oxford English Dictionary* describes as ‘transformation [or] alteration’, ‘the expression or rendering of something in another medium or form’, or ‘removal from earth to heaven’.⁴ Many perspectives exist on this concept, that a text can be translated from Latin to English; a saint can be translated from a physical life on earth to an eternal life in Paradise; an idea or institution can, as Shakespeare put it, become nothing more than a ‘translation of hypocrisy’.⁵ We seem to have many different takes on a very straightforward idea, that is, that ideas, people, texts, institutions can be changed, through language and perceptions, and be completely different, yet somehow still very much the same through that process of change.

Adding to these linguistic, technical aspects of translation the idea of spiritual translation, of spiritual change, often without physical change, especially for medieval mystical works, forms a kind of translational paradox particularly with respect to mystical works: the mystical experience

both can and cannot be translated, both is and is not linguistic, both changes and does not change the mystic and those who come to know her and her story. As Karma Lochrie argues,

The translation of practice into discourse and of bodies into texts is the next stage of mystical experience ... [the mystic] places language back into circulation with the flesh ... In her speech and practice, she violates the boundaries separating external and internal and the principle of specularity which operates between the two.⁶

This is especially true for the anchoritic mystic, one who was cautioned against knowing her flesh too well, but in her isolation must have been all-too aware of her physical being. *Ancrene Wisse* cautions the anchoress frequently about the dangers of sensuality:

Alsua as men worreð mid þreo cunes wepnas. wið scheotung ant
wið speres ord ant wið sweordes [egge], al richt wið þilke
wepnen—þet is, wið schute of eche, with spere [of] wund[i]n[de]
word, wið sweord of deadlich hond[lunge]—werreð Lecherie, þe
stinkinde hore, upon þe lauedi Chastete, þet is Godes spuse ...

Sweordes dunt dunricht—þet is þe
hondlunge; for sweord smit of nech ant zeueth deaðes dunt, ant
[hit] is [soðes]—weilawe!—nech i-do wið ham þe cumeth swa nech
togederes, þet ouðer hondli o[þ]er oðer ifele [oþer]⁷

(And just as men war with three kinds of weapons – with arrow's shooting and with spear's point, and with sword's edge – with just the same weapons – that is with arrows from the eyes, with the spear of wounding words, with the sword of deadly handling – this stinking whore lechery wars with the lady's chastity, who is God's spouse ... The sword's blow – that is, handling – is final, for a sword strikes from near at hand and gives the death-blow. And alas it is as good as over for those who come so close together that they handle one another or in any way touch one another.)⁸

Thus the anchorite would have understood the mutable nature of herself and of others, and would have believed in the potential for sin in any context. The anchoritic life and experience violate the boundaries of external and internal, or at least the very presence of the anchorite problematizes those categories, and the idea of specularity, of seeing and being seen, is one of the central metaphors and experiences of anchoritic mysticism, which in turn is unstable and transformative by its own very nature. Again, this is reinforced frequently in *Ancrene Wisse*; for example, all sin, beginning with Eve's original sin itself, is connected to sight for this author: 'þus

eode [sihðe] biuoren ant madeke wei to uuel lust'⁹ (sight went before and made a way for harmful desire).¹⁰ The anchorite is frequently reminded that sight, touch, taste, sound and smell are deceptive and can shift from blessed to sinful in a moment; change is manifest in all aspects of life, but since the anchorite must be on guard against sin even more scrupulously than other Christians, the anchorite cannot rely on her human senses to recognize good and evil. The anchorite is changed and reinscribed constantly in her experience, and that experience offers an opportunity for change to those around the anchorite: but none of this change, none of this translation, is fully knowable or transparent.

One of the most powerful metaphors of translation exists in the words *fidelity* and *faith* which are so often used in describing accurate translations: on some level any translation is an act of faith, on the part of the reader and of the translator. This occurs in part because of the notions of faith and spiritual faithfulness associated with devotional texts, the translations and the audiences, and in part because so many texts associated particularly with the anchoritic tradition depend on not a translator but a scribe who, in a sense, translates the life and often the mystical vision of the anchoritic subject. Interestingly, the word *faith* does not appear in the Wooing Group; the idea of Christianity as a state of belief appears only once (in a reference to Pentecost in *On Lufsong of Ure Louerde*). Indeed, the word *faith* in its earliest English form (*fey*) appears for the first time much later than these texts, in 1330 in such works as the *South English Legendary* and the *Harrowing of Hell* and does not appear in any other form in any of the early anchoritic works, including the Wooing Group, the Katherine Group and *Ancrene Wisse*. Other references to the word and concept of faith as, for example 'a system of religious doctrine accepted on belief' appear much later, in the works of Chaucer, Langland, the Gawain Poet and Malory.¹¹ It would appear that this sense of fidelity appears not only as a later medieval arrival from Old French but also as a concept used mostly by male authors and narrators, perhaps due to the medieval male obsession with sexual faith and marital fidelity (a concept also not mentioned in Middle English until Trevisa's translation of Higden's *Polychronicon*). The marginal status of women and their importance in medieval institutions, particularly with respect to marriage, may have a bearing on this idea. Faith as it is now understood, and would have been understood by later medieval writers, was not an issue when medieval women (before 1300) discussed their relationship with God; perhaps faith was assumed, or never questioned (it was surely never questioned from the perspective of the feminine speaker and the faith entrusted in her by God).

Christ the lover, so often described and pursued by the narrators of these early English works is never questioned in his faithfulness to the female wooers, and thus, perhaps, their 'faith' was also without question, even when under the scrutiny of a masculine translator or scribe.

The relative 'faithfulness' of a translation, therefore, may call into question a whole level of interpretation for the anchoritic subject: if her faith and that of the divine were never questioned, then the faithfulness of the translation, her own from earth to Paradise as well as that of her text, may also never have been at issue. This makes the concept of faith as a translational practice quite important: although the scribe must be faithful both to what he hears and to the patriarchal culture into which he is writing the voice of the narrator, on some level there is an unquestioning assumption of faithfulness to the authority of the feminine voice that may have gone without saying. Other writers have discussed the empowerment of the feminine voice in these early anchoritic works,¹² and more recent scholarship seems often to work against that idea, claiming that a male-authored text could never fully empower a female voice or speaker. However, the absence of *faith*, as a word and possibly as a medieval spiritual notion, may shed some light on the means by which the feminine was empowered through these works. As Karma Lochrie has argued, of Margery Kempe, 'she must assert her own orthodoxy as a Christian at the same time that she argues for her right to speak.'¹³ Although this is the standard interpretation of any female voice in the Middle Ages, perhaps this concept of unconditional faith between Christ and his female wooer/wooed in these early works provides a historical moment in which the medieval woman's assertion of her faithfulness to Christianity may not have been necessary, indeed may have been assumed, particularly with respect to anchorites and other holy women whose position in society provided them with a special kind of spiritual authority that would otherwise have been denied most women.

Julian of Norwich certainly possessed a high degree of spiritual authority, insofar as her manuscript was copied with some frequency and she was seen (at least by Margery Kempe, who visited her in part for advice and guidance) as one whose advice and counsel would have been significant, but because of her position (and through hers, that of Margery Kempe as well) she has to be seen as quite different from the women who may have written and certainly would have read the Wooing Group. Although they did not occupy a position of spiritual authority (as such) within their own time, these earlier, now unknown women would have had a kind of freedom unknown to women of the fourteenth century.¹⁴ Although it is quite unlikely that a woman wrote *Ancrene Wisse* or any of the Wooing Group

texts, women were their audience and would have made up the greater percentage of anchorites in England at the time.¹⁵ The early English anchoritic texts (*Ancrene Wisse*, the Katherine Group, and the Wooing Group) thus provide an opportunity for the spirituality and spiritual authority of women to be expressed, even though it is expressed through anonymous women. Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, living in the shadow of powerful male reclusive writers such as Richard Rolle, and the violent response to women who overstepped their bounds such as Marguerite Porete, had to manoeuvre within the presence of masculine authority and construct a space for themselves in which they could speak; many earlier women spoke without such fear (or with less of a fear of being silenced). Marguerite Porete was burned at the stake in Paris in 1310 because her book, *A Mirror for Simple Souls*, was associated by her accusers with the heresy of the Free Spirit; although not actually guilty of such heresy, Porete and her book were convicted and burned, sending a message of violence and patriarchal authority from the Church to other women who spoke out or wished to be heard. Indeed, as Lochrie and others have argued, Margery Kempe has been associated with Lollardy, another fourteenth-century heresy, since her *Book* first appeared, perhaps as yet another imposition of masculine authority on fourteenth-century women: those who wish to speak are always already breaking the law of the Church and must protect themselves, as Margery and Julian both did, from further scrutiny by associating themselves with orthodoxy. In both cases, a scribe or other masculine authority is involved in the creation of the anchoritic text, which leads to yet another issue of translation, the relationship between the scribe and the anchoress.

The relationship of the anchoritic writer to her male scribe or editor has been discussed elsewhere, but this notion of translation is extremely important due to the vulnerability of the anchoritic/mystical experience to corruption and mistranslation through the medium of language. Whether a mystic has transcribed her own experiences, like Julian of Norwich or Hildegard of Bingen, or has dictated them, like Margery Kempe, or if her experience has been described by a biographer, like the *Vita* of Christina of Markyate, some degree of translation must occur since the experience of mystical transcendence occurs in a space that transcends language. Anyone wishing to articulate such an experience must struggle for words that will come close to articulating this wordless divine encounter. It is a kind of translation, then, and one fraught with all the dangers and issues of linguistic translation, made more complex, of course, by the fact that the source text is not a text at all but an inscription on the body and soul of the mystic,

and thus the decoding of that experience is bound to fail to live up to the experience itself. Julian of Norwich is concerned in her book that she be fully understood: she knows what she experienced, but she wants the articulation of that experience to be understood by others. She writes:

For truly I saw and understode in oure lordes mening that he shewde it for he will have it knowen more than it is. In which knowing he wille geve us grace to love him and to cleve to him. For he beholde his heavenly tresure with so grete love on erth that he will give us more light and solace in heavenly joye, in drawing oure hartes fro sorow and the darknesse which we are in.¹⁶

Julian's vision began as an effort on her part to fully know God;¹⁷ it ends with her claiming that he wants his love and presence to be 'better known than it is' by all people; thus her task is to translate his message to as many people as possible. She translates God's meaning more clearly a few lines later,

What, woldest thou wit thy lords mening in this thing? Wit it wele. Love was his mening. Who shewed it the? Love. What shewid he the? Love. Wherefore shewed he it the? For love. Holde the therin, thou shalt wit more in the same.¹⁸

It is Julian's responsibility to offer a faithful translation of all she has seen and experienced, but it is not possible to fully articulate all that she has seen. Another example occurs when Julian witnesses the Crucifixion in *A Revelation*. Julian describes the bloody Crucifixion of Christ, providing the detail that his dead flesh hung on the body, and the blood, no longer living within him, weighed the body down in an unnatural way.

And in the beginning, while the flesh was fresh and bleding, the continual sitting of the thornes made the woundes wide. And furthermore I saw that the swet skinne and the tender flesh, with the here and with the blode, was all erased and losede above with the thornes, and broken in many pecis, and were hanging as they wolde hastily have fallen downe while it had kinde moister ... The garlonde of thornes was deyde with the blode. And that other garland and the hede, all was one coloure, as cloterred blode when it was dried.¹⁹

Julian must watch her saviour die a bloody and agonizing death, and she must describe it to her audience, but even she is overwhelmed by its brutality and violence and, ultimately, cannot find words to describe it. Liz Herbert McAvoy has argued that Julian's *translation* and articulation in the *Showings* is uniquely and deliberately feminine (and thus disruptive) to

patriarchal modes of expression. She writes: 'Julian's voice as represented in this text is both word and Word of God. As its female conduit, Julian renders it feminine and she is entirely confident that its purpose is explicitly for the common profit of humanity.'²⁰ In a sense, the language she knows, the language of patriarchy, has failed her, but she knows that the power of her transcendent experience can best be felt by her audience through the language of human desire and affection, and thus her translation can be summed up in one word: love.

Thus Julian of Norwich, again, a later English anchorite, provides an excellent example of anchoritic life and spirituality as a location for a discussion of this paradox of language and experience, of what could be described as the translation of the female (anchoritic) imaginary. Anchoritic enclosure provided both a denial of the body and an opportunity for an ascetic lifestyle that transformed and translated both the anchorite and her community. Ann Warren writes: 'primarily, the systematic and routine denial to the body of its instinctual satisfactions has at its goal the transformation of carnal desires into spiritual ones.'²¹ Thus the actual enclosure of the anchorite is a location of both physical and cultural change: the anchorite's physical identity switches from a public, culturally sanctioned role (of son or daughter, for example), to a role determined and proscribed by the Church, that of anchorite or anchoress. In *Ancrene Wisse*, the author writes:

Alswa al Hali Chirche, (þet is schip
icleopet) schal ancryn o þe ancre,
þet heo hit swa halde þet te deofles
puffes, þet beoð temptatiuns, ne hit ouerwarpen. Euch ancre haveð
þis o foreward, ba þurh nome of 'ancre' ant þurh þet ha wuneth
under the chirche²²

(Holy Church, which is called a ship, must anchor on the anchoress, in order that she may so hold it that the devil's blasts, which are temptations, do not overturn it. Every anchoress has made this agreement, both through the title of anchoress and the fact that she dwells under the church.)²³

The anchorite is entombed and anchored, bound by the physicality of the anchorhold, and is viewed by herself and others as being dead to the world. In the process of enclosure, the recluse is culturally dead, translated from a physical to a spiritual life. The anchoress is dead to the world and to herself, 'scraping up the earth every day out of the pit [she] will rot in',²⁴ but God is alive in her heart.²⁵ Warren argues that the recluse was not reborn through death as a result of his enclosure. She writes, 'the recluse ... would fully

“cross over” into a new stage and a new status only at death. Denied individuality, sexuality, rank, money, will, and speech – psychologically he became a nonperson rather than a new person.²⁶ I disagree here with Warren because mystical texts provide ample evidence for the idea that some kind of transcendent change occurred in the bodies and minds of many anchorites; still, there was a cultural and social change that took place through the performance of enclosure which would have been understood by both the anchorite and those who participated in that performance. Warren herself acknowledges a new status for the enclosed recluse, if only a social one. She writes:

Although theoretically the rewards of the contemplative life belonged mainly to the next world entrants into the religious life ... did undergo a rise in status even though they did not re-enter society in a manner that enabled them to use it competitively. The permanent institutionalization of the liminal state ... should have eliminated all social rewards resulting from change in status. But in fact some of these rewards were garnered by the person who was forever to deny his personality. If his whole life was to be a transitional stage, its realization only in the next world, the recluse was understood to have guaranteed his celestial future. He may have been a nonperson, but he was also a future saint.²⁷

This too is clear in the anchoritic literature. In the case of *Ancrene Wisse*, the narrator alternates his references to his audience from his better, an aristocratic lady to his equal, a beloved sister to his inferior, a low, fallen sinner: he calls her God’s bride (Intro: 47) dear sister(s) (I: 66), and worries that they may end up like ‘cackling Eve’ (I: 73). Because of the slippery nature of personal identity at all levels in medieval society the metaphorical translation of personal identity would have been easy to understand, though it would almost certainly have been magnified for a female recluse. Women existed in a liminal state within medieval society by their very existence as women, and thus this transitional stage of enclosure, this translation of the anchoress, would have been an experience understood by women more fully and more powerfully than by men. As Anne Savage has argued,

the anchoritic experience is defined in many ways as an essentializing of the feminine experience: the woman is refined by the process of *translatio* from the ordinary spheres of sexual identification in rape, seduction and marriage, pregnancy and childcare, into the anchoritic cell, where she becomes the betrothed, lover and bride of Christ, mother to her own eternal soul, and determiner of its fate.²⁸

Perhaps in part because of this open-ness to translation on the part of female anchorites and because of the erotic language so often used by and

for these women, there is also an open-ness in Christ's body, both literally and metaphorically, providing for a heterosexual exchange or translation of desire, authority and presence between Christ and the female anchorite that might not be possible for male anchorites under a heterosexual construct, although some recent scholars have begun to investigate the queer nature of desire in anchoritic spirituality.²⁹ Notwithstanding some interest in this subject, not much has been done with respect to male homosexual desire in anchoritic tradition, although interesting connections do exist, for example, between Rolle's *Fire of Love* and some interpretations of queer desire in other such works.³⁰ Much of the current focus on anchoritic scholarship has, however, been female heterosexual desire, especially with respect to the early English works of the Wooing Group. Again, as Anne Savage writes,

In spite of the invisibility of the anchoress to the community in which she lives, she too has made a dramatic and public renunciation of the world by her enclosure. In some ways the anchoritic life in the cell attached to the church represents the invisibility of an ideal, an inviolate femininity heroically maintained. Whatever the anchoress does escape in the form of marriage and all its woes, she certainly never escapes the carnal suffering of her femininity. In the privacy of her cell, though, she has the opportunity to translate that suffering into a different locus, to identify it as Christ's suffering.³¹

The translation of this suffering is clear in the emphasis in so many of these works to the flowing blood and open wound of Christ in his Passion and death. Christ's open-ness and susceptibility to penetration in these English anchoritic works (and thus his identification with the open, penetrated female body) has been discussed by many scholars. Karma Lochrie has pointed out that

As the place of mystical communication and knowledge, the wound of Christ offers the mystic access to mystical union. Yet the 'metaphor' for communication is threatened by erotic 'materializing' of the mystic experience ... As a place of mystical union and knowledge, the wound of Christ is sexualized even when the Latin homology is not present ... The coming to know Christ, which *imitatio* strives after, is an erotic act. Language, like imitation, travels across the integrity of the physical and spiritual realms of knowledge and signification.³²

The eroticization of Christ's wound can be seen in several of the Wooing and Katherine Group texts. In *Ancrene Wisse*, Christ is stabbed (literally and physically) and blood flows from him in a river, in a manner similar to the flow of menstrual blood. In Part 4 of the work he is described, as a

result of his Passion, as being covered with holes that the anchoress can fill up with her own body:

... flih to his
 wunden. Muchel he luvede us þe lette makien swucche þurles in him
 forte huden us in. Creop in ham wið þi þoht – ne beoð ha al
 opene? – Ant wið his deorewurðe blod biblod[ge] þin heorte ...
 ‘Ga into the stan’, seith þe
 prophete, ‘ant hud te i þe doluen eorðe’, þet is, i þe wunden of ure
 Lauerdes flesch ...
 ‘Mi
 Culure,’ he seið, ‘cum, hud te i mine limen þurles, i þe hole of mi side’³³

(Flee into his wounds. He loved us much who allowed such holes to be made in him for us to hide in. Creep into them with your thought – are they not entirely open? – and bloody your heart in his precious blood ... ‘Go into the stone’, says the prophet, ‘and hide yourself in the dug-out earth’, that is, the wounds of our Lord’s flesh ... ‘My dove’, he says, ‘come hide yourself in the openings in my limbs, in the hole in my side’.)³⁴

This passage echoes the Song of Songs here, which reads ‘My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall, shew me thy face, let thy voice sound in my ears: for thy voice is sweet, and thy face comely’ (Canticles 2:14). The biblical reference to the ‘hollow places in the wall’ is a powerful parallel to the experience of the anchoress for whom the text was written, and it resonates, again, with erotic desire and penetration. In *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd* and the works of the Wooing Group Christ is beaten, scourged, penetrated by nails in his hands and feet and by a spear:

he þurles his side
 cleues tat herte . & cumes flo-
 winde ut of þat wide wunde . þe
 blod þat bohte . þe water þat te world
 wesch of sake & of sunne.³⁵

(He pierces his side, cleaves that heart. And out of that wide wound comes flowing the blood that bought, the water that washed the world of strife and of sin.)³⁶

This is echoed over and over in these works: in *An Orison of God Almighty* the phrase is ‘3e large broc of 3ine softe si / de’³⁷ (the wide brook from your tender side.)³⁸ In *On Lofsong of ure Lefdi* the narrator makes a list of all the blessings of Christ’s Passion, including

bi his side openun-
 ge . bi his blodi Rune þat ron inne monie
 studen.³⁹

(by the opening of his side
by his streaming blood, which ran in many places.)^{40,41}

Christ's bleeding body simultaneously becomes the location of his death and the anchorite's salvation in these works, and this notion extends beyond the Wooing Group to the late English mystics, particularly Julian of Norwich, whose visions begin with an encounter with the bleeding Christ:

And in this, sodaynlye I sawe the rede blode trekille downe fro under the
garlande alle hate, freshlye, plentifully, and livelye, right as methought that is
was in
that time that the garlonde of thornes was thyrstede on his blessed hede.⁴²

Julian makes note of the plenteous and vibrant nature of the blood of Christ, something implied by the constant presence of his flowing blood in the earlier anchoritic works but not as emphatic. She says his blood is hot, fresh, plentiful and lively, providing a sensual reawakening to her as she falls away from her body and into the liminal state of mystical vision. This moment, although it often provokes a response of surprise to modern readers due to its sensual nature, is quite typical of later medieval blood piety. As Caroline Walker Bynum has explained in *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond*, 'blood was the only aspect of Christ that could claim both to be cut off from him and to continue his presence ... As such, it offered comfort or contact'⁴³ as it does for Julian, but for the earlier anchoritic writers of the Wooing Group it also offered an opportunity to dwell on sensuality and the violence of his death. As Bynum continues, the blood 'was also a result of violence against Christ. It breached his body. Thus it was accusation and reproach. Washwater that cleansed the faithful, blood was also a stain that fell upon them, coloring or marking them as guilty.'⁴⁴ In the Wooing Group texts, the speakers experience a kind of *jouissance*⁴⁵ in the presence of Christ's bloodied body. What makes these texts different from Bynum's sense of Christ's blood as 'accusation and reproach' is that the female speakers of the Wooing Group (perhaps with the exception of *On Lofsong of ure Lauerd*, as argued by Sarah Salih in her essay in this collection) feel no reproach and in fact feel invited to celebrate Christ's bloody death and the brutality that preceded it, as well as entering the body of Christ through his wounds.⁴⁶ As Elizabeth Robertson points out, 'a woman associates her vagina with Christ's wounds. The association that allows her access to a distinctly feminine voice unavailable to men: the lips of her vagina, Christ's wounds and her mouth are all linked symbolically.'⁴⁷ The use of Christ's blood as a simulta-

neous trope of suffering and pleasure is present in all of the Wooing Group texts, vastly exceeding what Bynum refers to as 'a source of joy and triumph' and a 'sweeter, sunnier piety'⁴⁸ to become a point of empowerment and erotic subjectivity for the female speakers, and readers, of these works.

Bettina Bildhauer has recently argued, partly in response to Bynum, that there is a difference between Christ's blood and the female blood and that the comparison, made so often, that women identify with Christ's suffering because of their own abjection omits an important gendered quality to masculine bleeding: 'Christ's blood is much closer to [men's] bleeding than to women's; it is sacrificial ... [a fighter's blood] is always public, shed in heroic fights in front of everyone, and relies on their witness function.'⁴⁹ Although I agree with the importance of connecting the wounds of Christ to the abject feminine body, it is important to keep in mind that medieval women such as the audience of the Wooing Group, one familiar with romance literature and, most likely, raised in an aristocratic or courtly culture, would have been accustomed to the public nature of male heroic bleeding and might have connected Christ's suffering to a knight (confirming *Ancrene Wisse* and *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd's* depiction of Christ as a lover-knight) while simultaneously, perhaps unconsciously, also seeing in him a violated feminized body. A frequently cited passage from the Wooing demonstrates this paradox:

feirnesse &
lufsum neb . flesch hwit under
schrud makes moni mon beo
luued te raðer . & te marre⁵⁰

(Beauty, a lovely face, a body white under clothing, make many men beloved all the sooner and all the more)⁵¹

Christ's body, vulnerable and white, is the most desirable of men: heroic and weak, beautiful and exposed, he is at once a lover-knight and a feminized victim.

Christ's body, and the body of the mystic, in these works, are translated; they are changed, but not changed. The mystic is and is not dead, is and is not herself, and is and is not both within her own body and literally inside the body of Christ. The translation (and penetration) of the bodies of Christ and the anchoress are both erotic and chaste. The human and divine bodies are both translated in a way that can only occur through the act of mystical union, and the speaker and her audience are thus re-encoded as part of the body of Christ and as new textual inscriptions of his Passion and desire.

In this essay I have tried to play with the idea of translation as a spiritual and linguistic notion with respect to the anchoritic tradition. As with any other issue associated with the anchoritic, what we know is too often obscured by our own twenty-first-century concerns and misunderstandings of medieval life. This brings us to the final aspect of translation and the anchoritic, which is cultural translation. Ann Savage struggled with this idea in her article, 'The translation of the feminine: untranslatable dimensions of the anchoritic works', from which I have already quoted above. In her article she questions the very process of literary translation of medieval works and argues that in some ways they can never be fully known because of the cultural differences between medieval and modern audiences. She writes of her experience of translating the anchoritic works:

I was not sure what could be recuperated in a translation for the modern reader whose religious experience or lack or rejection of it is in the context of an extremely different world. How much would actually need cultural translation, and how much would be simply carried along silently with the translated language like so much baggage, that is, unquestioned assumptions about women, women's bodies, their normal ranges of behaviour, and of course about what constitutes unusual feminine behaviour?⁵²

Savage argues that a real, faithful translation of these works (and by implication of any pre-modern work) may be impossible since we can never fully know the people who wrote the texts, and thus our understanding of their experiences is ultimately a flawed one. Any critic who attempts to approach these concepts of translation and spiritual transcendence would find it difficult to go much further than Savage in her pursuit of faithful translation, especially if one is seeking an understanding of the lives of medieval women, or of their experiences, whether they were enclosed as anchoresses or the wives and daughters of aristocratic men. Instead, I think the whole notion of translation should be re-examined and understood for its many layers and problems; this remains especially true for the anchoritic works because of the unutterable, unspeakable language of transcendence within the genre of mysticism, their unique position within that genre and their elusive, even seductive influence on modern scholars, historians and translators.

Notes

- ¹ *The Dream of the Rood*, ll. 14–20, trans. Elaine Treharne, p. 20.
- ² Warren, p. 32.
- ³ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *translate* as stemming from the Latin *transferre*, meaning ‘to carry or bring ... across, to or on the farther side of, beyond, over’ (*trans* and *transfer*).
- ⁴ ‘translation’. *Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner. 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989; *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. 8 January 2008 <<http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50256323>>).
- ⁵ William Shakespeare, *Love’s Labours Lost*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd edn, ed. Blakemore Evans et al. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1997) (V.ii.51).
- ⁶ Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994) p. 56.
- ⁷ Bella Millett (ed.), *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402, with Variants from other Manuscripts*, vol. 1, EETS os 325 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.160–5, 169–72.
- ⁸ Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Texts* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1991), p. 70.
- ⁹ *Ancrene Wisse*, 2.66.
- ¹⁰ Savage and Watson, p. 67.
- ¹¹ ‘feith (n.)’. *Middle English Dictionary*. Ed. Hans Kurath (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1952–2001); *The Electronic Middle English Dictionary* (University of Michigan. 4 January 2008 <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/medidx?size=First+100&type=orths&q1=faiht&rgxp=constrained>>). The word that means *faith* in the Wooing Group is *bileawe*, and it appears in several of the texts (the *Wohunge* is an interesting exception). However, the difference between *faith* and *belief*, however small in today’s culture, would have, in the climate of affective piety in which the Wooing Group texts are found, seemed much greater, and the one could not, I think, be substituted for the other.
- ¹² The early anchoritic works that compose the Wooing and Katherine Groups, as well as *Ancrene Wisse*, were, of course, authored by a man (or perhaps more than one). Thus there is no textual translation here, but rather a translation of the feminine itself, experienced by the readers of these works, perhaps even anticipated by their author, and that must be translated back from the wordless experience of transcendence into the patriarchal language of the Church. The difference in this context between the early anchoritic works and those of Julian and Margery is, then, one of translation: translation of experience vs. translation of text.
- ¹³ Karma Lochrie, ‘From utterance to text’, in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. and ed. Lynn Staley (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), pp. 243–55 (p. 246).
- ¹⁴ As Elizabeth Robertson argues, ‘Early Anglo-Norman anchoresses, those of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, may well have been motivated to enter anchorholds by their desire to retain the independence that the native Anglo-Saxon social organization allowed women before the Conquest’ (1990, p. 15).
- ¹⁵ See Ann K. Warren, ‘The nun as anchoress: England 1100–1500’, in *Medieval Religious Women: Distant Echoes*, ed. John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984), pp. 197–212.

- ¹⁶ *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p. 180.
- ¹⁷ One of the interesting facets of anchoritic spirituality is this idea, as described by Julian in her text, of the mystical vision as a translation of knowledge. Knowledge, knowing, is often a euphemism for intercourse in pre-Christian works, such as the Song of Songs on which so many early English anchoritic works are based. Knowledge of the beloved is both erotic and intellectual, and something of the wisdom of the beloved passes to the lover as a result of the erotic exchange. Interestingly in Song of Songs the narrator says, at a moment in which he feels detached from his lover, 'I knew not: [and] my soul troubled me' (6:11). This idea that knowledge can be translated through spiritual work is, as I said earlier, an inescapable part of the translation process.
- ¹⁸ *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, p. 67.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2004), p. 231.
- ²¹ Ann K. Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons in Medieval England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) p. 113.
- ²² *Ancrene Wisse*, 3.331–5.
- ²³ Savage and Watson, p. 101.
- ²⁴ Ibid., pp. 91–2.
- ²⁵ Ibid., p. 177
- ²⁶ Warren, p. 95.
- ²⁷ Ibid., p. 96.
- ²⁸ Anne Savage, 'The translation of the feminine: untranslatable dimensions of the anchoritic works', in *The Medieval Translator* 4, eds Roger Ellis and Ruth Evans, *Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies* (Birmingham: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 181–99.
- ²⁹ See two articles by Michelle M. Sauer: 'Cross-dressing souls: same-sex desire and the mystic tradition in *A Talkyng of the Loue of God*', in *Intersections of Sexuality and the Divine in Medieval Culture: The Word Made Flesh*, ed. Susannah Mary Chewning (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 157–81; and 'Representing the negative: positing the lesbian void in medieval English anchoritism', *thirdspace*, 3/2 (March 2004): 27 pars. (<http://www.thirdspace.ca/articles/3j23sauer.htm>). See also my article, 'Queer desire and heterosexual consummation in the anchoritic mystical tradition', in *Straight Writ Queer*, ed. Richard Fantina (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006), pp. 68–81.
- ³⁰ See Gerard Loughlin, *Alien Sex: The Body and Desire in Cinema and Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 12. Applying contemporary notions of queer theory to Rolle's work, Loughlin describes Rolle as 'in drag, as the soul-bride of the Song of Songs' (p. 12); he writes: 'Rolle's passionate treatise on the fire of divine love is intensely homoerotic, and the more so the more it denigrates the carnal and the sensual. For as with all this literature of divine lovemaking, Rolle must evoke the very thing he disparages in order to express a spiritual felicity that exceeds the embraces of interpenetrating bodies. The flesh he would shun provides the metaphoric body with which he embraces his heavenly lover' (p. 12). For

further 'queering' of anchoritic devotion (and other similar spiritual contexts) see Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); Denys Turner, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1995); Robert Mills, 'Ecce homo', in *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Samantha J. E. Riches and Sarah Salih (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 152–73; and Sarah Salih's essay in this collection, 'Transvestism in the anchorhold'.

³¹ Savage, p. 189.

³² Lochrie (1991), p. 70.

³³ *Ancrene Wisse*, 4:1629–42.

³⁴ Savage and Watson, p. 155.

³⁵ *Be Wohunge of ure Lauerde*. EETS os 241, ed. W. Meredith Thompson. (Oxford: Early English Text Society, 1958), ll. 542–6.

³⁶ Savage and Watson, p. 255.

³⁷ *An Orison of God Almighty* in Thompson, ll. 98–9.

³⁸ Savage and Watson, p. 323.

³⁹ *On Lofsong of ure Lefdi* in Thompson, ll. 55–7.

⁴⁰ Savage and Watson, p. 330.

⁴¹ *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, p. 67.

⁴² Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p. 178.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ I have discussed this notion of *jouissance* as the mystic's response to her encounter with the abject body of Christ in my article 'Mysticism and the anchoritic community: "A Time ... of Veiled Infinity"', in *Medieval Women in their Communities*, ed. Diane Watt (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), pp. 116–37. See also Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

⁴⁵ The erotic qualities of Christ's wound in the anchoritic works have been discussed at length by several recent scholars; see Liz Herbert McAvoy, 'Monstrous masculinities', in *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, ed. Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 55–74; Elizabeth Robertson, 'The rule of the body: the feminine spirituality of the *Ancrene Wisse*', in *Seeking the Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Writings: Essays in Feminist Contextual Criticism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), pp. 109–34; Kristen McQuinn, "'Crepe into that blessed side": Enclosure imagery in Aelred of Rievaulx's *de Institutione Inclusarum*', in *Anchorites, Wombs, and Tombs: Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), pp. 95–102 (p. 96); see also Michelle M. Sauer's essay in this collection, "'Be blod þ[at] bohte": the Wooing Group Christ as pierced, pricked and penetrated body'.

⁴⁶ Robertson, 1990, p. 74.

⁴⁷ Bynum, p. 15.

⁴⁸ Bettina Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), p. 139. Bildhauer is building here on Peggy McCracken's study, *The Curse of Eve*,

The Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

⁴⁹ *De Wohunge of ure Lauerde*, ll. 13–16.

⁵⁰ Savage and Watson, p. 248.

⁵¹ For further discussion of Christ as a lover-knight see Jennifer N. Brown's essay in this collection, 'Subject, object and mantra in *De Wohunge of ure Lauerde*'.

⁵² Savage, p. 182.

Subject, Object and Mantra in *þe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*

JENNIFER N. BROWN

I would like to begin this essay on the *Wohunge of ure Lauerd* at its own beginning – the given title: ‘Her biginnes þe wohunge of ure lauer[d]’.¹ Although the obvious term to contest may be *wohunge*, with its erotic and romantic implications, I am more interested in the small and neglected *of*. The *Oxford English Dictionary* records twenty-nine different uses for this preposition, whose rise to prominence really began with the collapse of the genitive case in Anglo-Saxon and its conflation with the French word *de*. The word *of* in this phrase can mean both *by* or *about*. Both meanings were prominent in the early Middle English represented in the *Wohunge*.² How we read *of* in the title can affect how we read the entire meditative piece that follows. Is Christ the object or the subject of the wooing done here? While most scholars have read the speaker as the Wooer, and thus Christ as object of the Wooing, the speaker is also the recipient of the courtship, and Christ the subject. I would like to suggest here that the slipperiness of the term *of* is intentionally meant to blur the boundaries of speaker and hearer, subject and object in the *Wohunge*, ultimately creating the presence of Christ in the absence of the anchorhold.

Much vernacular devotional literature of the Middle Ages was written for oral delivery and to be heard rather than read, but the texts of the Wooing Group seem uniquely suited to have been both ‘heard’ and ‘read’ by the same solitary speaker. It is intended as a meditation practice that, as Denis Renevey has argued, leads the speaker to ‘share the experience’ of Christ’s Passion.³ The text is meant to produce a mystical experience for the anchoress who holds it in her hands. This is not unique to the *Wohunge*,

which participates in a small but discrete tradition of poems, rules and meditations written for anchoresses and religious women in medieval England. Bella Millett has noted about these texts that ‘we see not only the recording in writing or works originally intended for oral delivery, but the development of something still closer to our modern concept of “literature”, vernacular works composed with readers rather than hearers in mind.’⁴ The writers of the texts for anchoresses – those in the Wooing Group, the Katherine Group and *Ancrene Wisse* – had a challenge in that they were writing both for the spiritual edification and as a kind of companion to their readers.

The anchoress’s cell can be a lonely place, indeed, is meant to be, and its often solitary occupant most likely relied on these meditative practices to fill the anchorhold with presence and voice. In writing the *Woyunge*, the author needs to create a dialogue where there is none, both for the edification (and sanity) of the anchoress, as well as for the purity and preservation of her position. Patricia Rosof has written that the greatest temptation for an anchoress is doubting one’s decision for enclosure, spurred on by the imposed isolation.⁵ This intentional ambiguity of wooer and wooed in the *Woyunge*, linked with mnemonic techniques and rhetorical strategy, culminates in a kind of literal Jesus-made-word and word-made-Jesus for the recluse, where she can call up Christ at will as spouse and companion.

The *Woyunge* carries this ambiguity of wooer/wooed throughout the prose-poem in its allusions, word choice and structure. Many scholars have recognized this fluidity and the different ways it manifests itself throughout the text. For example, Susannah Mary Chewning has argued that the ambiguity extends to the gender of both speaker and subject:

The speakers of these texts seem to speak with similarly erotic and devotional language about Christ, their bridegroom, and about Mary, their bride or mistress, thus shifting the gaze from a masculine Other to one that is, or seems to be, feminine. This further complicates the question of sexual identity for the speakers (and readers) of these texts: if the gender of the wooed can shift, then is the same true for the gender of the wooer?⁶

The gender-identities of both subject and object are malleable, shifting seamlessly back and forth throughout the text. This is an intentional collapse. Not only does the subject and object change, they are interchangeable. This effectively creates a dialogue out of a monologue, reinforces the spouse/bride-of-Christ relationship, and eventually leads the speaker/reader to a place where she *is* Christ, indistinguishable from him. It also leads the mystical reader to her place of self-abnegation, dissolving into the absent

space of the anchorhold until all that remains is the presence of her spouse, lover and lord: Christ.

Like Chewning, Michelle M. Sauer has also recently looked at the interplay of gender in the Wooing Group, suggesting that the male author has created a space where he could perform – or ‘cross-dress’ – as a woman, allowing for a different kind of affective piety than usually permitted for men. She posits that ‘the male author appropriated female words without altering the situations, thrusting his male character into a feminized position. The struggle for subjectivity is illustrated through the continual changing from pursued to pursuer.’⁷ Through the lens of S/M theory, Sauer sees a struggle in the text between author and reader, wooer and wooed, with its genesis in the gender confusion that arises when a male author is writing not only for a female audience, but from a female point of view. Like the dynamics of a real relationship, the power constantly moves from one participant to the other.

I would like to suggest, here, that these elements of confusion, blurring and collapse which both Chewning and Sauer have recognized in the language of the *Wohunge* are intentional linguistic choices by the author of the poem. Like the *of* in the first line, the text is deliberately ambiguous, bringing the reader from wooer to wooed, speaking and spoken to, making the line between her and her spouse, Christ, completely unfixed. Rather than simply stating that the reader should imitate Christ, imagine herself in him, the writer has written in such a way that this identification is *de facto*. The anchoritic reader loses herself in the text and through this loses herself in the world (moving her again towards a moment of desired self-immolation) and achieves a mystical union with Christ through the language, as we shall see.

The *Wohunge* opens in the tradition of the Song of Songs, an allusion to which it returns throughout the text, and it is worth briefly examining the contested role the Song held in medieval Biblical exegesis both before and after the *Wohunge* author put words on vellum in order to recognize how it may contribute to this vagueness of subject and object. Its highly erotic language – structured as a love poem between a bridegroom and bride – could only be understood as religious when allegorized. All of the great commentators of the Bible from Origen to Gregory to Bede approached the Song and what it *must* mean, since something of such an erotic – and secular – nature could not otherwise exist within the Bible.

Other medieval commentators acknowledged that the Song of Songs had a literal meaning, one that includes erotic love, but that the allegory of the lovers was where the actual worth resided. The lovers not only became the

Christ/Church dichotomy that Augustine proffered, but also the individual Christian and Christ. The *Glossa Ordinaria* names the bride in the Song to be first the Church, but could and should be interpreted as the individual Christian soul, as well, as it traces the evolution of the exegesis. The mystical writers, though, soon take up this secondary interpretation and place it at the forefront of their commentaries and references to the Song of Songs. Eventually, the bride-as-soul image becomes virtually the only interpretation that commentators follow, leaving the allegories that Augustine and Origen espoused obsolete.

The Song of Songs was used by mystical writers throughout the Middle Ages in order to emphasize the relationship between the individual and Christ in an affective way. The Middle English writer and mystic Richard Rolle is particularly noted for doing so, both writing about the Song in his own sermon and utilizing its imagery in his vernacular poetic meditations that reflect in many ways the language examined here. What Ann Astell writes about Rolle, certainly applies to the anonymous author of the *Wohunge*:

As Rolle matures, he enters into a conscious relationship with his own *anima* by appropriating the words and attitudes of the Bride in the Song of Songs. In doing so, he opens himself, in the whole and holy way common to the great mystics, not only to the feminine principle within his own soul and to the women in his life, but also to God himself as the Bridegroom and Source of Song. In this matter of affective integration, which is closely related to that of mystical development, Rolle's commentary on his own life cannot be separated from his biblical exposition.⁸

Like Rolle, the writer of the *Wohunge* has blurred the boundaries between male and female, speaker and listener, wooer and wooed. The writer renders himself indistinct from his speaker and from his prayer. Rolle used the language of the Song when writing for women, as did many other medieval male authors. The writer of the *Wohunge* clearly saw in the image of the bride a natural metaphor to offer their women readers. As Bella Millett points out in this volume, the author is entering a dialogue along with many contemporary devotional authors where the possibilities for co-opting this kind of metaphor, used thus far mainly in theological texts and in the monastery, for the laity are suddenly clear.⁹

In addition to the imagery of the Song, male medieval writers adopted certain stylistic techniques for their women readers. In her study on women and devotional prose in the early Middle Ages, Elizabeth Robertson outlined the style of writing that arose in response to its female audience:

Because these audiences had little contact with Latin intellectual centers and because the members of such audiences also were assumed to be rooted in the experiences of the body, literature written for them abandoned logical, teleological, and abstract argumentation and focuses instead on the particularity and fluctuation of everyday experience. That focus inspired the use of particular stylistic techniques, including affective syntactic devices such as parataxis, climax, and alliteration; concrete description; and figures of speech, including metaphors, similes, and analogies, in which the bases of comparisons were drawn from everyday experience.¹⁰

Like Rolle, especially, the writer of the *Wohunge* moves beyond metaphor. The image of the Bride is a particularly useful analogy for the writer of the *Wohunge*. Writing with an anchoress in mind, the author is dealing with a woman who has given up in an extreme way a worldly life, yet he still reaches for the earthly images which he imagines women can understand. The ‘everyday experience’ that metaphorically ruled most women’s literature is limited for the anchoress to an imagination for the world outside of her anchoritic cell. To this end, it is easy to see why a writer would choose an image like the bride that would govern a woman’s life from birth (to either be bride to man or bride of Christ) and that plays such a prominent role in biblical exegesis.

The verse from the Song picked up by the *Wohunge* author links its feminine figure with a sensual experience of taste: ‘I come to my garden, my sister, my bride, I gather my myrrh with my spice, I eat my honeycomb with my honey, I drink my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends, and drink: drink deeply, O lovers!’ (Canticles 5:2). While not overtly sexual, the elements of wine, spice, honey, combine to suggest a kind of sexuality. These elements, along with the alliteration mentioned by Robertson, are clearly and deliberately reflected in the opening lines of the *Wohunge*:

Iesu swete iesu . my druð . my der
ling . mi drihtin . mi healend
mi huniter . mi haliwei . Swet
ter is munegunge of þe þen / mildeu o muðe’.¹¹

(‘Jesus, sweet Jesus – my dearest, my darling, my Lord, my Savior, my nectar, my healing balm. Sweeter is the memory of you than honey in the mouth’.)¹²

The honey of the Song of Songs is clearly mirrored in the words *huniter* and *mildeu*. However, the ambiguity of subject and object is also highlighted in this explicit link to the Song. While this part of the Song shows the bridegroom singing of the bride’s sweetness, the speaker of the

Wohunge is directing this to Christ. The subject of taster and tasted has been reversed. Even though it seems clear thus far that the speaker is the Wooer, singing her love song to her bridegroom, the obvious biblical allusion reminds the reader that this is in response to a bridegroom's love-talk to his bride. The Song of Songs has given the writer his vocabulary, but he has intentionally blurred the gender of the speaker. Although this certainly lends itself to the questions of homoeroticism and cross-dressing raised by Chewning and Sauer, it is also a seemingly intentional ambiguity on the part of the writer to emphasize the union of reader and Christ and his presence there, in her cell.

Later the writer again uses the imagery of the Song in order to describe Christ's Passion. The use of the biblical metaphor allows the writer (and speaker) this very ambiguity encoded throughout the text; the speaker can be bride of Christ, mother of Christ through the image of the Virgin, or the soul. As Renevey has shown, this use of the Song, and the slipperiness of subject and object that it encourages, opens up the text for a specific kind of affective engagement.¹³ The reader is given an array of roles with which she can choose to identify, but all require a deeply felt emotional connection to Jesus.

The writer begins by setting up the structure for the entire first part of the prose-poem with an entreaty to her spouse, preparing the reader for both revelation and mystical experience:¹⁴

Hwa ne mei
 luue þi luueli leor? Hwat her
 te is swa hard þat ne mei to mel
 te iþe munegunge of þe? Ah hwa ne mej luue þe luueli-
 che iesu? For inwið þe an earn
 alle þe þinges igedered þat eauer
 muhen maken ani mon lu-
 uewurði to oðer'¹⁵

(Who could not love your lovely face? What heart is so hard that it could not melt with the memory of you? Wherefore, who could not love you, lovely Jesus? For within you alone are all the things that ever might make any person love-worthy to another.)

The questions, of course, are rhetorical, positing a sceptical listener whose heart may not have been yet turned towards Christ in general or an anchoritic life specifically. But these second-person questions also suggest a response from the lover-spouse. Unlike many of the other texts associated with the Wooing Group, such as *Ancrene Wisse* where the repetition of '3e

ancren' throughout its preface and text remind the readers who they are and who is writing for them, the reader here is not merely passively receiving the words, but actively saying them.

The speaker continues on to describe the attributes of the perfect worldly husband, such as handsomeness, wealth, braveness and generosity.¹⁶ Ann Savage and Nicholas Watson point out, in the introduction to their 1991 translation of the *Wohunge*, that this reinforces twofold to the reader: what she has given up and what has come to her as a result of relinquishing the worldly life.¹⁷ She may not have the earthly suitor with these qualities (although the text is careful to point out, no such man exists), but instead she has the perfect celestial spouse:

feirnesse &
lufsum neb . flesch hwit under
schrud makes moni mon beo
luued te raðer . & te marre . Sum-
me gold & Gersum & ahte of
þis werlde makes luued & he-
ried . Sume fredom & largesce
þat leuer is menskli to ȝiven
þen cwedli to wið halde. Summe
with & wisdom & ȝapschipe of
werlde . Summe maht & streng
ðe to beo kid & kene ifiht his
riht for to halde . Summe no-
blesce . & hehnesse of burðe .
Summe þeaw . & hendeleic & laste-
lese lates . Summe menske &
mildeschipe & debonairte of
herte & dede . And ȝette ouer al
þis kinde makes sibbe frend
euchan to luuen oðer.¹⁸

(Fairness and a beautiful countenance, along with white flesh under clothes, make many men beloved all the more readily, and all the more. For gold and costly goods and possessions of this world are some loved and lauded; some for generosity and largesse, as in those whose desire is to give generously rather than to basely withhold; some for wit and wisdom and worldly prudence; some for might and the strength to be renowned and keen in battle to protect the just cause; some for nobility and highness of birth; some for virtue and courtesy and flawless manners; some for honor and mildness and gentleness of heart and deed. And yet, over all this, nature makes friends who are related love one another.)

Like the parable of the knight-lover in *Ancrene Wisse* (Part 6, ll. 59–97), the speaker uses the image of the perfect lover to demonstrate to the reader how Jesus fulfils that role.¹⁹ The enticement of marriage is built up for its readers only to be eventually deconstructed. Here, the speaker outlines the many things that attract someone to their beloved: appearance, wealth, generosity, wisdom, strength, nobility and mildness.

Within the ensuing seven sections (in modern editions broken into paragraphs), the speaker enumerates how exactly these qualities are already fulfilled by Christ. When ultimately faced with the choice of the earthly lover or the heavenly one, the anchoress has been wooed convincingly by Christ; she chooses the heavenly spouse. Catherine Innes-Parker writes that while many scholars have read the anchoress in both the *Wohunge* and *Ancrene Wisse* as passively accepting Christ, this act of choosing necessarily makes them active participants in their own devotion.²⁰ By necessitating a choice within the confines of the text, the writer has again underscored the dialogic nature of the piece and the dependence upon the reader's active engagement with it.

The structure of this first part of the text also serves as a mnemonic device for its readers. The writer of the *Wohunge* has virtually set up an outline for the first half of the meditation, but has also – in the first lines of the prose-poem – set up a mantra to be repeated at intervals throughout the text and to signal a change in the meditative practice: 'Iesu swete iesu'. Mary Carruthers, in her two-book study of medieval memory, *The Book of Memory* and *The Craft of Thought*, has outlined how medieval memory, meditation and prayer worked for medieval writers and readers. In both of these works we find clues as to the *Wohunge* author's structural process. Carruthers writes that the mnemonic strategy of a medieval author begins with an emphasis on the title of the work:

The mnemonic requirement for a firm starting-point also gives a practical context for the critical importance given in medieval commentary to the title of a work, an emphasis that often seems to us bizarre ... everything else both in the text itself and its accompanying commentary will be linked in an order from this point.²¹

If we take the given title of the piece, 'Her beginnes þe wohunge of ure lauerd', as a kind of generic marker – much as the other pieces in the Wooing Group are called 'Ureisuns' or 'Lofsongs', the first line, 'Iesu swete iesu' (Jesus, my sweet Jesus), becomes the mnemonic starting-point Carruthers discusses. The repetition in itself suggests a kind of poetic device.

This first line reiterates in various patterns, closing sections of the poem and serving as a mantra throughout the poem recurring as ‘A iesu swete iesu leue þat te luue of þe beo almi likinge’ (Ah, Jesus, my sweet Jesus, grant that the love you be all my delight) in lines 55–6, 77–8, 105–6, 117–18, 158–9, 194–5, 215–16, 251–2 and 364–5. In these last two instances, the scribe has shortened the phrases to ‘A iesu swete iesu leue þat te.’ etc., indicating his knowledge and his reader’s expectation that this is a refrain which functions as a dividing point at key moments in the text. Rachel Fulton posits in a recent article about medieval prayer that ‘the best prayers ... would be divisible into small, “memory-sized” chunks so that the mind would not be fatigued or overwhelmed in trying to recollect them.’²² The repetition of this memorization-sized groupings of words acts as the divisions between these ‘chunks’, in the *Wohunge*, as well as becoming a locus of the prayer – the meditation on Jesus, his body and his relationship to the speaker. If there is any doubt to whom the speaker is directing her prayer, the constant repetition will remind her. It also consistently invokes Jesus’ presence in the anchorhold; it does not allow the slippage of the speaker into herself but rather into Christ.

The link between repetition, mantras and mysticism – most clearly imagined today in Buddhism and other eastern religions – was firmly rooted in the medieval mind and practice of affective piety. For example the etymological root of many terms used for fringe religious groups and heretics in the Middle Ages came from words meaning ‘to stammer’ or ‘to mumble’. Walter Simons, in his major study about the beguines of the Low Countries, noticed these commonalities:

All of these terms, *beguina*, *papelard*, and *lollaert*, originally stood for a person in private prayer, so private in fact that his or her speech cannot be understood. Its pejorative connotations were clear from the start: the individual claimed to be devout, but was she really praying? She gave the impression of chanting devoutly, but we have only her word for it, because we do not actually recognize the sounds; hence the notion that she may be a hypocrite ... To call someone a beguine or *papelard* or *lollard* was more than to question her sincerity: she spoke another language that defied comprehension.²³

The alliteration and repetition throughout the *Wohunge* will lead to a meditative state, but may also lend itself to the kind of ‘other language’ to which Simons refers. Carruthers also notes Fortunatianus (a fourth-century rhetorician) and his advice for memorizing: ‘reciting in a low voice or murmur is also a very useful technique’.²⁴ In this case, the *sotto voce* prayer leads to a kind of private conversation between the speaker and Jesus, rein-

forcing the dialogic nature of the wooer with the wooed. In a nearly empty cell, surely the whispered voice is heard just as clearly as a loud one.

Each of the seven sections that enumerate the qualities of a perfect husband embodied in Jesus ends with a form of the mantra 'Iesu swete iesu', performing the duty of dividing the text into memory-sized pieces. Carruthers likens these patterns as part of a mental topography or network:

Medieval cognitive pattern-making 'locates' knowledge, but *within* and *in relation to* other 'things'. The locational networks – finer even than the filaments of as spider's web – are rich devices of thinking, constructing patterns or 'scenes' within which 'things' are caught and into which they are 'gathered' and re-gathered, in innumerable ways, by individual human minds.²⁵

The reader of the *Woyunge* recognizes the repetition as a kind of road-map to the piece, knowing that they signal a change in the pattern of the poem. These words work like the refrain of a song, identifying the closing of each section describing each marital quality.

When this first section of the *Woyunge* ends, an interesting transition takes place. The writer sums up the preceding seven sections (the marital qualities of Christ) in one sentence, both verbally and mentally reminding the reader what has just been argued:

Denne

þu wið þi fairness . þu wið ri
chesce . þu wið larges
ce . þu wið wit & wisdom . þu wið
maht & strengðe . þu wið nobles
ce & hendeleic . þu wið meknes
se & mildeschiþe & mikel debo
nairte . þu wið sibnesse . þu wið
alle þe þinges þat man mai lu-
ue wið bugge; haues mi luue
cheþet.²⁶

(So then: you with your beauty, you with your wealth, you with largesse, you with wit and wisdom, you with power and strength, you with nobility and courtesy, you with meekness and mildness and much graciousness, you with family connections, you with all the things that one may purchase love with ... you have procured my love.)

Structurally the poem has thus far given an outline, described each section of that outline, and now summed it up. For a reader or memorizer, the poem could not be easier to break down into manageable sections. Like a rhetorical

pathway, the reader has been led from point to point and told when she has arrived at her destination.

By the time that the speaker has reached this section, she has been more wooed than the wooer. Even though it is she describing Christ's qualities, and seeming to be the active participant here, it is Christ who possesses them. He has effectively proved himself the ideal husband, and in the process of recognizing these elements, the speaker has been wooed. The effect here is to create action where there is passivity and voice where there is silence – Christ has wooed the speaker of the *Wohunge* simply by being, and it has happened in the course of the piece itself.

The *Wohunge* then shifts to the next part of the narrative where the poet again sets up an outline, sectioning the text into the small parts that are to follow:

þu biddes me
 bihalde hu þu faht for me . þat i
 pouerte of worlde ne schome of
 wicke monnes muð for uten
 mine Gulte . ne secnesse of mi
 bodi . ne flesches pine drede . hwen
 þat i bihalde hu þu was poure for
 me . hu þu was schent & schomet
 for me : & atte laste wið pineful
 deað hanged orode.²⁷

(You bid me behold how you fought for me, so that I would not dread the poverty of the world, no shamefacedness from wicked people's mouths when I am without guilt, no sickness of my body, nor the flesh's pain; then I beheld how you were poor for me, how you were mistreated and shamed for me, and, at last in painful death, hung on the cross.)

The writer is clearly spelling out the dialogue that the speaker is to be having with her spouse Christ, here ('þu biddes me ...'). In addition, the sections that follow again address the points outlined, so that the reader begins by discussing Christ and the poverty of the world (ll. 350–414), followed by the shame Christ endured (ll. 414–58), and moving into a Passion meditation that takes the speaker from Pontius Pilate (ll. 458–88) through to Christ's death (ll. 532–46).

While Christ is addressed in the second-person pronoun 'þu' throughout the piece (reinforcing the lovers' discussion and relationship between subject/object, wooer/wooed), there is a curious change of person at the moment of Christ's death in the description of his Passion:

A þat

luuelike body þat henges swa rewli
 swa blodly & swa kalde . A hu schal
 i nu liue for nu deies mi lef for
 me up o þe deore rode? Henges
 dun his heaued & sendes his saw-
 le . Bote ne þince ham nawt zet
 þat he is ful pinet . ne þat rewful dea-
 de bodi nulen ha nawt friðie .
 Bringen forð longis wið þat bra-
 de scharpe spere . he þurles his side
 cleues tat herte . & cumes flo-
 winde ut of þat wide wunde . þe
 þlod þat bohte . þe water þat te world
 wesch of sake & of sunne.²⁸

(Ah, that lovely body that hangs so dolefully, so bloody, and so cold. Ah, how shall I live now? For my love now dies – for me – upon the precious cross; he hangs down his head and sends forth his soul. But yet, they do not think at all that he is adequately tortured, nor will they leave that pitiful dead body in peace. They bring forth Longinus with his broad, sharp spear, and he pierces that side, cleaves that heart. And flowing out of the wound comes the blood that bought, and the water that washed the world of strife and of sin.)

The speaker who addresses Christ in the second person in all parts of the *Wohunge* – both immediately before and immediately after this paragraph – has switched to a third-person description of Christ at the moment of his death in her ‘memory’ of the Passion. It is as if the moment itself is too present, and thus painful, for the speaker to place herself in the intimate dialogue with Christ that she has been having. She needs to distance him from herself and place this scene as if she is the observer, no longer a participant. It is also the moment when there is no object, no person to dialogue with the speaker – both before and after Christ’s death he is available to woo and speak, but at the moment of his death, he is merely a boy, outside the piece.

This sharp change is also part of the mnemonic technique of the poem. It closes the second section of the piece, Jesus’ Passion, and the switch is surprising and changes the tone. Carruthers writes: ‘The cogitating mind tires easily, is easily bored, easily distracted. So the craft of *memoria* requires energizing devices to put it in gear and to keep it interested and on track, by arousing emotions of fear or delight, anger, wonder, and awe.’²⁹ The moment of Christ’s passion is the pivotal moment in the *Wohunge*, and the writer’s switch of person indicates this both explicitly and implicitly to the

reader. In the moment when the most affective response is demanded from the reader, she is divorced from the one-ness and dialogue with Christ that she has had to this moment, feeling both the pain of his death and the literal separation from him.

The last section of the *Wohunge* literally links the speaker to Christ, repairing the fissure that the Passion provoked, and moving from the two separate figures outlined in the first part of the piece to an idea of oneness, the complete dissolution of the anchoress into the person of Christ:

A swe
te iesu þu oppnes me þin herte
for to cnawe witerliche & in to re-
den trewe luue lettres . for þer
i mai openlich seo hu muchel
þu me luuedes . Wið wrange sch-
uldi þe min heorte wearmen
siðen þat tu bohtes herte for herte.³⁰

(Ah, sweet Jesus, you open your heart to me, so that I can know it indeed, and in it read true love-letters. For there, I may openly see how much you loved me. Only unjustly could I deny you my heart, since you redeemed heart for heart.)

This section satisfies many functions for the text of the *Wohunge* as a whole. For one thing, it validates that this is not a one-sided speech from the speaker directed to Christ. In fact, he is responding through the ‘luue letters’ of his heart, an open book within which the speaker can read his love. In addition, the speaker gives over her heart to Christ in exchange for his (‘herte for herte’). It is here, after his death, where this bargain is made – not in the early ‘wooing’ section of the text where Christ’s husbandly qualities are spelled out. Finally, the metaphor of the heart – both Christ’s and the speaker’s – are essential to our understanding of the rhetorical strategies of this poem.

The writer of the *Wohunge* has used a metaphor with two separate purposes and fused them into the particular needs of this piece. Eric Jaeger explains the major ways the idea of ‘book of the heart’ has been used in the Middle Ages:

Sermons and poems liken the heart to a book where the believer writes God’s commands or where Christ writes the story of his own Passion. In the secular lyric and romance a different passion inscribes itself on lovers’ hearts, sometimes by way of love letter and usually anticipating the bodily writing of sexual intercourse.³¹

The Christ of the *Woyunge* fulfils both of these functions – he has written the story of his Passion for the believer to read and feel, but he is also the lover who has written on his spouse’s heart, proclaiming his love over her mind and body. In addition, though, the heart is also the location of intellect and memory. Not only is Christ known to the speaker through her heart; so is the text of the *Woyunge* – a reminder that these are words committed to her memory and placed there for a reason. It is no coincidence that the term ‘by heart’ means ‘by memory’.³²

In order to reinforce the unity of bride and spouse, wooer and wooed, the speaker turns to her own enclosed body and links it to Christ’s passion. This startling passage completely blurs the boundaries of subject and object in the *Woyunge*:

My bodi henge
wið þi bodi neiled o rode . sper-
red querfaste wið inne fowr
wahes & henge I wile wið þe
& neauer mare of my rode cu
me til þat i deie . For þenne sch-
al i lepen fra rode in to reste .
fra wa to wele & to eche blisse
A . iesu swa swet hit is wið þe
to henge . forwhen þat iseo o þe
þaet henges me beside ; þe mu-
chele swetnesse of þe rea-
ues me fele of pine.³³

(May my body hang with your body nailed upon the cross, enclosed transversely within four walls! And I will hang with you, nevermore to come off my cross until I die. For then shall I leap from the cross into rest, from woe into rapture and into everlasting bliss. Ah, Jesus, so sweet it is to hang with you! For when I see you, who hang beside me, the vast sweetness of you frees me from a great deal of my pain.)

This passage stresses the merging of Christ and the speaker; even the very sentence structure and grammar reflect this blending. In the first phrase here, ‘My bodi / henge wið þi bodi neiled o rode’, it is unclear *whose* body is nailed to the cross, this phrase can modify either ‘my bodi’ or ‘þi body’. Similarly the phrase, ‘sper- / red querfaste wið inne fowr / wahes’ can also modify either the ‘þi body’ that it follows, or the ‘I’ that follows it. These rhetorical and grammatical choices by the writer further blend the subject and object for the wooer. Significantly, this ambiguity would not happen in

Latin, so the author is playing with the vernacular here and the ability to shift subject and object that are afforded by its use.

This section also emphasizes, as Chewning has pointed out, a celebration of the anchoress's mimicked death along with Christ's actual one.³⁴ While the body of Christ is nailed to the cross, it is also suspended between the four walls of the anchorhold. Simultaneously, the anchoress is both inside the anchorhold and on the cross. This moment represents the culmination of the the *Wohunge*, the point where wooer and wooed are fused into one both textually and literally. If the piece is meant to both provoke and mimic a mystical experience, it is at this point in the meditation where such a moment occurs. The anchoress no longer exists; there is only Christ.

Following this moment, and closing the meditation, the writer (and speaker) are brought back to the beginning of the meditation. Again, reinforcing the 'first line' that Carruthers notes is so essential to medieval meditation and prayer:

A iesu swete iesu mi luue . mi
 lef . mi lif . mi luue leuest
 þat swa muchel luuedes me
 þat tu deides for luue of me
 & fra þe world haues broht
 me . & ti spuse haues ma
 ked me . & al þi blisse ha-
 ues heht me ; leue þat
 te luue of þe beo al mi
 likinge.³⁵

(Ah, Jesus, sweet Jesus, my love, my beloved, my life, my dearest love, who has loved me so much that you died for love of me, who brought me from this world, and who has made me your spouse, and who has promised me all your bliss, grant that the love of you be all my delight!)

The mantra and refrain return here, after an absence during the depiction of Christ's Passion. It is essential that the meditation return to the beginning because the wooing, and the dialogue surrounding it, will never end. This, too, reinforces the idea of enclosure; the enclosure of the anchorhold and the envelopment of Christ's love surround the anchoress just as the words of the text do. She ends where she began, whether wooed or wooer.

Indeed, the writer steps outside of the meditation at its close and reminds the reader the purpose of the text and how it should be used. Acknowledging the powerful force of spoken words and how they both address and conjure Christ in the anchorhold, the writer allows the modern reader to see exactly how the piece was meant to be employed by its recipient:

Þis haue I writen
 þe for þi þæt wordes ofte
 quemen þe heorte to
 þenken on ure lauerd
 And for þi hwen þu
 art on eise carpe to-
 ward iesu & seie þise
 wordes . & þenc as tah
 he heng beside þe blo-
 di up o rode . And he
 þurh his grace opn[e]
 þin heorte to his luue
 & to reowðe of his pine.³⁶

(This have I written for you, inasmuch as words often enchant the heart, to think on our Lord. And therefore, when you are at ease, talk to Jesus and say these words, and envision that he hangs beside you, bloody upon the cross. And may he, through his grace, open your heart to his love and to grief for his pain.)

The writer's emphasis on 'talking' and 'saying' the words of the piece reinforce that they are intended to be spoken out loud, filling the anchorhold with the sound of the *Wohunge*. The 'envisioning' demonstrates that through the power of these spoken words, Christ is meant to be there – in the anchorhold – talking back to the anchoress. Finally, her heart is 'enchanted', it has been marked with the words and image of Christ's passion.

This remarkable meditation has within it all the structure and tools for its eventual memorization, and although it eventually leaves the anchorhold to find its place in monastic libraries, its initial purpose is clearly one of companionship and presence. The anchoress has given up the earthly spouse, but the heavenly one is waiting for her and is far more than simply an idea. Through the mantra and language of the *Wohunge*, he is there, a wooer, a companion and a presence.

Notes

¹ *Þe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, p. 20.

² The former definition is represented in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) under *of*, usage 15.a: 'expressing the relation of agent (doer or maker)'. The earliest OED example is 1225 from Ælfric's homily *De Initio Creaturae*. The latter definition is demonstrated in usage 25 'concerning, about; with regard to, regard-

ing'. The *OED*'s earliest example of this usage is early eleventh century in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles.

³ Renevey, 'Enclosed desires', p. 58.

⁴ Millett, p. 99.

⁵ Rosof, p. 133.

⁶ Chewning, 'The paradox of virginity', p. 114.

⁷ Sauer, 'Cross-dressing', p. 159.

⁸ Astell, p. 112.

⁹ Millett, p. 253.

¹⁰ Robertson, p. 179.

¹¹ *Be Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, ll. 1–5. The alliteration here is clearly intentional, and may have even been a stretch for the writer of *The Wooing*. The word *druð*, for example, does not appear anywhere else in the AB texts (Laing and McIntosh, 253).

¹² I am grateful to Michelle Sauer for lending me her forthcoming translation of *Be Wohunge* to use in this article. The book is still in production, so there are no page numbers, but the reference is as follows: *Be Wohunge Group and A Talkyng of the Loue of God: Translated from the Middle English with Introduction, Notes, and Interpretive Essay*, Library of Medieval Women (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2009).

¹³ Renevey, 'Enclosed desires', p. 56.

¹⁴ For more on how meditation and mystical experience intertwine throughout the *Wohunge* and its analogues within the Wooing Group, see Renevey, 'Enclosed desires'.

¹⁵ *Be Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, ll. 5–13.

¹⁶ As Millett's article in this volume shows, these elements were elsewhere attributed to both earthly and spiritual spouses in thirteenth-century continental texts, but the author does not seem to expect such familiarity from his readers.

¹⁷ Savage and Watson, pp. 25–6.

¹⁸ *Be Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, ll. 13–32.

¹⁹ For a fascinating comparison of the knight-lover in *Ancrene Wisse* and *Be Wohunge*, see Catherine Innes-Parker's article 'Ancrene Wisse and *Be Wohunge of ure Lauerd*'.

²⁰ Innes-Parker, p. 143.

²¹ Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, p. 86.

²² Fulton, p. 708.

²³ Simmons, pp. 122–3.

²⁴ Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, p. 86.

²⁵ Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, pp. 34–5.

²⁶ *Be Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, ll. 252–62.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, ll. 308–17.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, ll. 532–46.

²⁹ Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, p. 117.

³⁰ *Be Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, ll. 546–53.

³¹ Jaeger, p. 1.

- ³² The *OED* puts the first usage of *heart* to mean *intellect* or *memory* in the tenth century, and the phrase ‘by heart’ to mean ‘by memory’ at Chaucer (see *heart*, n, definitions 12 and 32).
- ³³ *Þe Woyunge of ure Lauerd*, ll. 590–602.
- ³⁴ Chewning ‘The paradox of sensuality’, p. 187.
- ³⁵ *Þe Woyunge of ure Lauerd*, ll. 635–44.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, ll. 646–58.

The spellings <e>, <ea> and <a> in two
 Wooing Group texts (MSS London,
 Cotton Nero A.xiv and London,
 Lambeth Palace 487)

JEREMY SMITH

Introduction

In what remains one of the best and most sensitive editions of *Ancrene Wisse*, Geoffrey Shepherd characterized the language of the Corpus MS, so-called ‘AB language’, as follows: ‘probably best thought of as a standard but local literary dialect of Middle English’.¹ Recent research, however, has shown that the reification of AB along such lines is problematic.

The term *standard*, for instance, begs many questions. Modern scholarship holds that a variety has undergone standardization when it has been subjected to processes of selection, elaboration, codification and acceptance. This typology of standardization, first developed by Einar Haugen, has been effectively formulated by Richard Hudson² as follows:

Selection: ‘somehow or other a particular variety must have been selected as the one to be developed into a standard language.’

Codification: ‘some agency such as an academy must have written dictionaries and grammar books to “fix” the variety, so that everyone agrees on what is correct.’

Elaboration of function: ‘it must be possible to use the selected variety in all the functions associated with central government and writing ... and of course in various forms of literature.’

Acceptance: 'the variety has to be accepted by the relevant population as *the* variety of the community – usually, in fact, as the national language.'

No form of early Middle English meets any of these criteria, and indeed the process of standardization of written English was really completed only in the early Modern period.³

The notion of AB as a reified entity, first developed by J. R. R. Tolkien, has of course been challenged. A notable discussion is that by Merja Black (now Merja Stenroos), who considers that the two texts which are usually seen as canonical examples of AB, viz. MSS Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 402 (A) and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 34 (B), though clearly written in similar language, should be seen within the wider context of Middle English dialects. Black points out that it was not unknown, especially during the early Middle English period, for texts to be copied *literatim*, i.e. letter-for-letter, and this means that it is unnecessary to posit a reified entity 'AB': MSS A and B, although copied by different scribes, may simply derive their language from the writing-system of a single scribe who produced their exemplars. That single scribe could well, of course, have been the same person as the scribe of either A or B. Although, for convenience, the term 'AB' will continue to be used in this article, Black's arguments are very cogent ones.⁴

However, other parts of Shepherd's description might stand, notably his reference to AB as 'local'. All varieties of early Middle English can be described as local; early Middle English scribes, when not copying *literatim*, seem to have been in the business of revising their inherited writing systems to reflect local practices of reading. This restriction relates to the contemporary status of the vernacular; a 'standard' language existed in England in the Middle Ages, used for national and indeed international purposes, but that standard language was Latin. For instance, Magna Carta, the great statement of English liberties formulated in 1215, was composed in Latin, though a later French version also survives.

Local practices of reading the vernacular can be presumed to have been based on traditional principles. In the West, reading has for centuries been taught on so-called 'phonic' principles in accordance with the classical doctrine of *littera* ('letter'), whereby a grapheme (*figura*, to use the ancient and medieval term) has been mapped on to phoneme (*potestas*). In present-day English, such teaching is in some ways problematic, since our standard writing system, which has national and indeed international functions, has to cater for discrete phonologies. Thus modern teachers tend to supplement

phonic teaching with other strategies (e.g. 'look and say', 'whole-word teaching').

In Early Middle English conditions, this modern limitation did not apply, since writing systems varied from place to place and could reflect local phonologies. Some scribes, obviously, were more prodigal than others, representing fine-grain distinctions in their writing systems which seem not to have had implications for the phonology on to which their writing system mapped. But in general the relationship between *figura* and *potestas* was closer in the early Middle English period than it is now. Scribes, catering for a readership whose encounter with written English would be restricted for the most part to texts copied in their locality, took the writing systems they inherited and modified them to allow for closer *figura*–*potestas* mapping, thus making writing easier to interpret by those taught to read on phonic principles.

Perhaps the most famous example of this sort of behaviour is witnessed by *The Ormulum*, a text which dates from c.1200 and is thus roughly contemporary with the earliest surviving texts of *Ancrene Wisse*. *The Ormulum*, famously so called after its author (Orm), survives in a holograph manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 1) composed in what seems to modern eyes to be a writing system of bizarre exoticism; but in early Middle English conditions this system is wholly explicable, as an attempt to develop a logical usage for local consumption. Derek Britton (personal communication) has referred to the early Middle English period as the 'age of mini-Orms'. AB, like 'Ormish', is a remodelled form of the written language characteristic of its time.

The same goes for the language of other texts traditionally linked with AB, such as those of the Wooing Group. Now, it has been traditional to argue that the Wooing Group texts are written in a mixture of AB and other language, but this argument is based on two problematic arguments. First, it relates to the notion that all scribal copies of texts represent *Mischsprachen*, where author and subsequent scribes have all contributed to the linguistic mixture to be found in the surviving manuscript. This view – which may be summed up as the dictum that 'the language of every text is the result of its textual history' – has been challenged by Michael Benskin and Margaret Laing.⁵ Of course, *literatim* copying and 'true' *Mischsprachen* are known to have existed in the Middle English period; the Cotton MS of *The Owl and the Nightingale*, where one scribe copies two distinct spelling systems, is a good example of both (see Atkins for a full account⁶). But Benskin and Laing argue forcefully that scribal translation is the dominant mode of copying during the Middle English period, and that the view that various

'layers' of language can be peeled off one from another, like the skins of an onion, to reveal the underlying 'authorial' usage, entails the unnecessary multiplication of entities. It is therefore important, before claiming the presence of mixed language or a *literatim* scribe, to attempt to accommodate as many linguistic forms in a single layer as possible.

Secondly, and more relevantly for the purposes of this paper, the claim that the language of Wooing Group texts contains a mixture of AB and other forms relates to the notion of AB as a reified, literary language. Even W. Meredith Thompson, albeit in a measured and qualified way, considers this likely: 'in AB certainly and in these other manuscripts probably, we are dealing, not with "pure" local dialects, but with cultured and eclectic literary media, of which the regional colouring is less strongly marked and the provenance less rigidly confined.'⁷

However, such conclusions need to be modified in the light of recent research. Although the language of the four manuscripts in which the texts of the Wooing Group survives resembles AB, this is because these texts too come from the West Midlands. The scribes of these texts were not aiming (uncertainly) at some reified standard variety. Rather, as Thompson puts it elsewhere their usage 'is largely based on late OE, but modified both by subsequent development and by the influence of French'.⁸ In other words, inherited practices have been remodelled to reflect changes in pronunciation characteristic of the locality: 'In most cases orthographic and phonetic features are closely connected.'⁹

The implications of the situation for students of the history of English during the period are also clear: written language can be used as evidence for local pronunciation. However – and this is a crucial caveat – this evidence needs careful analysis. Middle English scribes were not descriptive phonologists, and their usage was constrained by a number of factors: their exemplars, the usages they had inherited, practices they had learned when copying other languages. It is best to consider such scribes as witnesses for pronunciation; and, like all witnesses, their testimony has to be subjected to forensic examination, and is thus open to challenge.

In this paper, an attempt will be made to examine the evidence supplied by two Wooing Group texts, N and L, for one of the trickiest problems in early Middle English phonology: the significance of the spellings <ea>, <e> and <a>.

The Problem

One problem where debate continues is to do with the interpretation of the spellings <e, ea, a> in AB language, described by Simone D'Ardenne as 'the most important and difficult section of the phonology of AB'.¹⁰ Similar, though distinct, difficulties are presented by the Wooing Group texts. To understand the problem, it is necessary to relate AB language to its presumed Old English ancestor, i.e. Old Mercian, represented most notably by the Gloss to the Vespasian Psalter (VP), which dates from the ninth century. There are several features of the language of VP where a connection with AB language can be detected, but for our purposes the most significant is that both texts manifest the operation of a distinctive Mercian sound-change known as Second Fronting.

Second Fronting is so called to distinguish it from First Fronting, a change which took place in all the ancestor-varieties of English and which seems to pre-date the arrival of the Angles and Saxons in Britain. Second Fronting seems to have taken place in the prehistoric period, soon after the Anglo-Saxons came to Britain but before the appearance of written texts.¹¹

Second Fronting may be illustrated simply by a comparison between Old Mercian and a better-known variety where Second Fronting had not taken place, viz. West Saxon. The West Saxon form for present-day English 'day' is *dæg*, plural *dagas*. This paradigmatic alternation is usually accounted for as follows: *æ* arises from an earlier Proto-West Germanic *a* as the result of First Fronting, while the *a* in the stressed syllable of *dagas* derives from the operation of a later conditioned development whereby *æ* > *a* in the environment of a back vowel in the following unstressed syllable (in this case *a* in *-as*).

In Old Mercian, the paradigm for 'day' is *deg*, *dægas*. In both cases, the vowel appears to have undergone a further fronting (*a* > *æ*) or raising (*æ* > *e*), which latter development also, given the nature of the vocal tract, involves fronting. For this reason, the Old Mercian development is known as Second Fronting. It seems likely that, in Old Mercian, the *e* produced by Second Fronting was distinguished from *e* of other origins.¹²

It should be noted that the fronting *a* > *æ* is comparatively restricted in the Old Mercian record, and indeed many Mercian texts other than the Vespasian Psalter Gloss manifest an alternation *e* – *a* rather than *e* – *æ*. This pattern would suggest that the primary change is *æ* > *e*, and that the fronting *a* > *æ* was a sporadic 'drag-chain' phenomenon which took place because the phonological space had become available within the open series of vowels.

It is, of course, usual to describe the language of the Vespasian Psalter Gloss as the ancestor of AB, and it is therefore not surprising that AB language also shows the effects of Second Fronting. Thus, in AB, the nominative singular of 'day' appears as *dei*, and 'after' appears as *efter* (cf. Vespasian Psalter Gloss *deg*, *efter*). The spellings for reflexes of Vespasian Psalter *æ* are mixed; in general they appear with <ea>, but other spellings are also found. For instance, *dahes* appears in AB for 'days', not **deahes*. It is usual to argue that this latter development is the result of a lowering of the sound in the environment of a following *c*, *g*, *h*; and there are many other examples.¹³

The most recent thoroughgoing discussion of the effects of Second Fronting in AB is that by George Jack. Jack noted that there have been two traditional interpretations of the process: that by D'Ardenne, supported by Eric Dobson, and that by Arne Zettersten, supported by Gillis Kristensson.¹⁴ Jack summarises the two interpretations diagrammatically (see Figure 1, p. 93). In his own interpretation, however, Jack steers a middle path between these two views. He supports Zettersten's view that the graph <e> 'denoted two distinct short phonemes, one being the reflex of OE *e* from sources other than second fronting and the other the reflex of *e* from second fronting',¹⁵ but he also supports Dobson's argument¹⁶ that it is unlikely, given that the system represented by AB was the result of an earlier remodelling to reflect local phonological distinctions, that <e> would have been used as a grapheme for /æ/ 'simply through orthographic conservatism',¹⁷ as argued by Kristensson,¹⁸ and points out that another symbol, viz. <ea>, was available for the purpose and indeed used in AB regularly 'where OE had *æ* or *ea*, where OE had *e* before *r*, and where OE *æ̃* and *ēa* underwent shortening'.¹⁹ As Jack puts it, 'The only plausible explanation for the largely systematic difference in distribution between <e> and <ea> in vocabulary inherited from OE is that the symbols represented distinct sounds when the spelling-system of AB was established'²⁰ (see Figure 2, p. 93).

Jack argues that the sound-system represented by the remodelled writing system which is the basis of written AB included the vowels /e/ and /ɛ/ (both spelt <e>), /æ/ (spelt <ea>) and /a/ (spelt <a>), with /ɛ/ representing the effect of Second Fronting. However, he also indicates that /ɛ/ and /æ/ were 'in the process of coalescence while the AB language was in use',²¹ as witnessed by occasional spellings such as *hwheat* beside more common *hwet* 'what', *ledde* beside more common *leadde*.²²

<æ, a, e> in the Wooing Group

e as the reflex of West Saxon *æ* also appears generally in Wooing Group texts in MSS Cotton Nero A.xiv (N) and Royal 17.A.xxvii (R): *feste, efter, bet*.²³ Texts in the other south-west Midland collection, MS Lambeth 487 (L), regularly have *a*. However, in all three MSS sporadic variants may be found: thus *hwat* and *was* appear from time to time in N, and *hwet* and *wes* appear very occasionally in L (the Wooing Group text in R, which seems to have been inserted by a distinct hand in the thirteenth century, is comparatively brief and does not seem to have any variants; it is not therefore discussed further here). Thompson considers these forms to be the result of '[d]ialectal admixture'.²⁴ There are also one or two forms N – and L – in *ea*, e.g. *weaschen* (N), *eafter* (L), which Thompson considers 'may be blends'.²⁵ In this discussion we will focus on aspects of the language of N and L.

According to Margaret Laing, it is possible to offer a localization of the language of these texts.²⁶ For N, she cites Michael Samuels (personal communication): 'the language is S Worcs not far from the Gloucs border. It could conceivably belong to N Gloucs, but going on the later evidence it seems to have more in common with Worcs than Gloucs in an area where there are later some crucial divides'.²⁷ For L, she cites Samuels as follows: 'MLS places the language on the border of N Herefords and Salop'.²⁸

These localizations are, of course, preliminary, and will no doubt be refined on the completion of Laing's major survey of early Middle English dialects. But for our purposes they may be accepted here.

Jack's discussion of AB language allows us to interpret these spellings in a more convincing way. The sporadic <ea> forms in N, L would seem to be relics of a system where /ɛ/ and /æ/ were in process of coalescence. What, though, about the occasional forms in <a> beside <e>?

Here, work by Gillis Kristensson is again relevant. Kristensson's major discussion of the dialectal distribution of Second Fronting appears in the second volume of his *Survey of Middle English Dialects 1290–1350*, dealing with the West Midland counties.²⁹ Kristensson's work is based on the analysis of the orthography presented in the Lay Subsidy Rolls, documents which cover almost the whole medieval English-speaking area and which contain a large amount of onomastic material. Kristensson has been able to show that this material 'reflects the local dialects with great accuracy',³⁰ and thus makes it possible to correlate spellings and sounds with a considerable degree of confidence.

Kristensson examines all the place-names in the West Midlands which contain the reflex of Old English *æ*, which under Second Fronting devel-

oped to *e*, and shows that <e> is much rarer than <a>; he argues, very reasonably, that the <a>-spelling reflects a pronunciation in /a/. He shows that these <a>-forms are native to the area, and not the result of 'influence from adjoining dialects'.³¹ His basis for so arguing is the evidence from place-names such as *Stafford* in Staffordshire (with the first element derived from OE *stæð*), *Naptone* in Warwickshire (with the first element derived from OE *hnæpp*) and *Baddeseye* in Worcestershire (with the first element derived from OE **Bæddi*). Kristensson argues that, 'if /a/ forms had spread from adjoining dialects [as suggested by Dobson, 1972], they could not possibly have spread to compound place-names whose joint elements were unrecognizable in the Middle Ages.'³² Kristensson (followed by Jack) thus considers the appearance of /a/ for Old Mercian *e* to be the result of 'phonetic development',³³ whereby /ɛ/ (the product of Second Fronting) 'was lowered to /æ/ and subsequently to ME /a/'.³⁴

However, the question arises as to what Kristensson means by the notion of 'phonetic development'. Classic sound-changes are splits (e.g. the emergence of a phonological distinction between voiced and voiceless fricatives in the transition from Old to Middle English), mergers (such as the loss of a distinction between '<ea>' and '<ee>' words which took place in the early Modern period) and shifts (such as the Great Vowel Shift of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries). But these metaphorical usages are simply descriptive of emergent processes whose origins lie in delicate interactions between speakers. It is therefore tricky to argue for a 'phonetic development' without making any connection to the broader mechanisms of linguistic change, viz. variation, contact and systemic regulation.³⁵

The problem, it might be argued, derives from an insufficient appreciation of key notions to do with variation and phonological space. First, it is very likely that, alongside forms with <æ> (which subsequently underwent Second Fronting) there were also forms in Old English with <a>, often produced by paradigmatic variation (cf. *dæg* – *dagas*, *hwæt* – *hwat*–). The phonological distinction between the sounds written <a> and <æ> seems to have been somewhat indistinct in Old English times, and comparatively 'low-yield' in terms of minimal pairs; as Campbell puts it, '[o]ne of the most obvious peculiarities of the [Old English] phonological system is that *æ* and *a* interchange.'³⁶ In such circumstances, by-forms are to be expected. It is possible, therefore, that the forms in <a> in the Woong Group texts simply represent not 'dialect mixture' but rather are reflexes of variants – by-forms – in the ancestor-variety of Old English.

However, the existence of by-forms does not account for the very regular lowering which Kristensson detects in the place-name evidence for the

early Middle English of the West Midlands, and thus an alternative – or perhaps complementary – explanation is required. Here, notions of phonological space and systemic regulation are relevant. It should be noted that a four-height system of short vowels, as presumed by Kristensson and Jack, is somewhat unstable in the history of English. The /ɛ/ which arose from Second Fronting, which (it can be plausibly argued; see Smith 2007) may have arisen as a ‘monitoring’ response to fronted realizations of Old English *a* within the phonological space occupied by open vowels, was thus unstable, and liable to merge – ‘coalesce’ – with other sounds. We can thus expect mergers, and a merger with the reflex of Old Mercian *æ* would be a plausible possibility.

This development would be encouraged, no doubt, by contact with neighbouring speakers of non-Mercian varieties whose realizations of Old English *æ* would overlap in phonological space with Mercian realizations of /ɛ/; it is a well-known fact that, even now, southern varieties of English tend to have prototypical realizations of historic short vowels which are closer within phonological space. In this sense, both Kristensson and Dobson are right: the lowering process is a ‘phonetic development’ in the Mercian accent, but it is also encouraged (if not derived solely) from ‘influence from adjoining dialects’.³⁷ That the role of contact is important is suggested by another of Kristensson’s findings, viz. that <e> remains a frequent spelling for words presumed to be subject to Second Fronting in northern varieties.

Conclusion

The discussion above indicates the importance of close textual analysis of delicate spelling variants in texts such as those in N and L. It is commonplace – still – in some editorial traditions to condemn scribal activity as a distraction from more important matters relating to authorial intention. But this short article has attempted to show two things. First, and most obviously, scribes are valuable informants for linguistic historians. The evidence of N and L, alongside other information, enables us to develop new theories about language change during the Middle English period and account for some of the oddities which occur there.

But, more broadly, the fact that scribes during the early Middle English period attempted in their writing systems to reflect very delicate distinctions in local phonology reminds us that the old view of a ‘standard’ AB which had decayed at the hands of the scribes of N and L is inappropriate

and anachronistic. N and L were copied by scribes who were attempting to reflect local usage, no doubt with a local readership in mind. A research question which obviously arises is: what was this local readership? What other texts did they engage with? Is it possible – to use a notion gaining considerable currency in other areas of medieval studies – to place N and L and their copyists on a ‘cultural map’? These research questions, and others like them, are open for further investigation.

Figure 1³⁸

(1) D’Ardenne and Dobson

Early OE	Late OE	Early AB	Later AB
/e/ - - - - -	/e/ - - - - -	/e/ - - - - -	/e/ - - - - -
/ɛ/ - - - - -	/e/ - - - - -	/e/ - - - - -	/ɛ/ - - - - -
/æ/ - - - - -	/æ/ - - - - -	/æ/ - - - - -	/ɛ/ - - - - -
/æa/ - - - - -	/æ/ - - - - -	/æ/ - - - - -	/ɛ/ - - - - -

(2) Zettersten and Kristensson

Early OE	Late OE	Early AB	Later AB
/e/ - - - - -	/e/ - - - - -	/e/ - - - - -	/e/ - - - - -
/ɛ/ - - - - -	/æ/ - - - - -	/æ/ - - - - -	/æ/ - - - - -
/æ/ - - - - -	/æ/ - - - - -	/æ/ - - - - -	/æ/ - - - - -
/æa/ - - - - -	/æ/ - - - - -	/æ/ - - - - -	/æ/ - - - - -

Figure 2³⁹

Early OE	Late OE	Early AB	Later AB
/e/ - - - - -	/e/ - - - - -	/e/ - - - - -	/e/ - - - - -
/ɛ/ - - - - -	/ɛ/ - - - - -	/ɛ/ - - - - -	/æ/ - - - - -
/æ/ - - - - -	/æ/ - - - - -	/æ/ - - - - -	/æ/ - - - - -
/æa/ - - - - -	/æ/ - - - - -	/æ/ - - - - -	/æ/ - - - - -

Notes

¹ Geoffrey Shepherd (ed.), *Ancrene Wisse: Parts VI and VII* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972), p. xv.

² Richard Hudson, *Sociolinguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 33.

³ See Jeremy Smith, *An Historical Study of English* (London: Routledge, 1996) and ‘Standard language in early Middle English?’, in *Placing Middle English in Context*, ed. I. Taavitsainen (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), pp. 125–39.

⁴ Margaret Laing, ‘Never the twain shall meet: early Middle English – the East–West divide’, in Taavitsainen, pp. 97–124 (p. 120, n. 8).

- ⁵ Michael Benskin and Margaret Laing, 'Translations and *Mischsprachen* in Middle English manuscripts', in *So Meny People Longages and Tonges: Philological Essays in Scots and Medieval English Presented to Angus McIntosh*, ed. Michael Benskin and M. L. Samuels (Edinburgh: The editors), pp. 55–106.
- ⁶ John W. H. Atkins, *The Owl and the Nightingale* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922).
- ⁷ *Be Wöhunge of ure Lauerde*. EETS os 241, ed. W. Meredith Thompson (Oxford: Early English Text Society, 1958), p. liii.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xii.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xii.
- ¹⁰ Simone T. R. O. D'Ardenne (ed.), *Be Liflade antte passium of Ste Iulienne* (Oxford: Early English Text Society, 1961), p. 181.
- ¹¹ See Alistair Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 108 for the chronology of Second Fronting relative to other sound changes.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 63, para. 167.
- ¹³ See George Jack, 'The reflexes of second fronting in the AB language', *English Studies*, 71 (1990), 289–306. There are one or two texts where the fronting of *a* is 'perhaps more common than the raising of /æ/', viz. the Mercian glossaries. This development is interesting, but requires special discussion. I propose to pursue this matter further in future work on the origins of Second Fronting; see Richard Hogg, *A Grammar of Old English: Phonology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 141, para. 5.90.
- ¹⁴ See Eric Dobson, *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwe (Cleopatra MS)* (Oxford: Early English Text Society, 1972); Arne Zettersten, *Studies in the Dialect and Vocabulary of the Ancrene Riwe* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1965); and Gillis Kristensson, 'Old English "Second Fronting" revisited', *NOWELE*, 1 (1983), 61–76 and 'A Middle English dialect boundary', in *Linguistics across Geographical and Historical Boundaries*, ed. D. Kastovsky and A. Szwedek (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986), pp. 443–57.
- ¹⁵ Jack, p. 291.
- ¹⁶ Dobson, p. lxxiii, n.1.
- ¹⁷ Jack, p. 292.
- ¹⁸ Kristensson, 'Old English "Second Fronting" Revisited', p. 71.
- ¹⁹ Jack, p. 303.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 305.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 304.
- ²² D'Ardenne, p. 182.
- ²³ Thompson, p. xxx.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*.
- ²⁶ Margaret Laing, *Catalogue of Sources for a Linguistic Atlas of Early Medieval English* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1993), pp. 78, 111.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 78.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 111.
- ²⁹ Gillis Kristensson, *A Survey of Middle English Dialects 1290–1350: The West Midlands Counties* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1987).

- ³⁰ *A Survey of Middle English Dialects 1290–1350: The Six Northern Counties and Lincolnshire* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1967), p. xii.
- ³¹ Kristensson, *A Survey of Middle English Dialects 1290–1350*, p. 40.
- ³² *Ibid.*, p. 40.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- ³⁵ See Michael L. Samuels, *Linguistic Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972) and Jeremy J. Smith, *Sound Change and the History of English* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007).
- ³⁶ Campbell, p. 60, para. 157.
- ³⁷ Kristensson, *A Survey of Middle English Dialects 1290–1350*, p. 40.
- ³⁸ Jack, p. 290.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

De Wohunge of ure Lauerd and the Tradition of Affective Devotion: Rethinking Text and Audience

CATHERINE INNES-PARKER

De Wohunge of ure Lauerd represents a rare moment in Middle English devotional literature. Aside from *Ancrene Wisse*, it is the first instance of a Middle English devotional text which incorporates both the Anselmian prayer and meditative techniques which had become so influential in the religious milieu of the twelfth century, and the affective devotion to the divine spouse which the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux had popularized among male and female religious alike. But the *Wohunge* also looks forward: it is the first instance of an affective, meditative text in the English vernacular, anticipating the popular Franciscan devotion of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Finally, it is the first 'stand-alone' Passion meditation in Middle English, and thus the first of a genre which would come to dominate the vernacular theology of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Like *Ancrene Wisse*, then, the *Wohunge* occupies a transitional position in the literature of devotion. But so, too, does its audience, which occupies a medial position between religious and lay, literate and illiterate.¹ The *Wohunge* was the last of the anchoritic texts to have been written, post-dating *Ancrene Wisse* in both its original and, probably, its revised form. It is important, therefore, to recognize the influence of the evolving anchoritic audience, and not simply to identify the *Wohunge's* audience with the original audience of *Ancrene Wisse* (even that of the revised *Corpus* version). And although this audience was, in the first instance, an anchoritic one, the *Wohunge* almost certainly found its way into lay hands.

In what follows, I would like to re-examine the audience of the Wooing Group, and the *Wohunge* itself, and consider what this reconsideration of audience implies for our reading of the *Wohunge*. I propose that we must resist some of the assumptions that characterized the reading of the *Wohunge* in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (including my own). It is generally assumed that the readers of the *Wohunge* were young, naive women, whose experience of love was limited to reading romances and dreaming of the ideal husband – an audience similar to that posited by the author of *Hali Meidhad* as his ‘ideal’ or ‘intended’ audience. The assumption of a maidenly, sheltered anchoress leads to two related difficulties. First, there is a tendency to read the affective devotion of the *Wohunge* almost entirely through the lens of the contemporary romance tradition. Second, there is an assumption of immaturity that belies the sophistication and multi-valence of the *Wohunge*. In the reconsideration of the audience and context of the *Wohunge* which follows, I will argue for two things: that the audience of the *Wohunge* had a maturity of outlook and experience that is often ignored; and that the context and content of the *Wohunge* looks forward to the Franciscan devotion of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as much as it looks back to and incorporates the imagery of romance and the Bernardine tradition.

Unlike *Ancrene Wisse* and the texts of the Katherine Group, the *Wohunge*, and the prayers which together form the Wooing Group likely originally circulated on scrolls or individual leaves.² *Wohunge* itself is not long – it comprises only 5½ folios in the Titus manuscript.³ The other prayers, found in Nero,⁴ are even shorter: *On God Ureisun of ure Lefdi* (UrLe)⁵ is approximately 2½ folios,⁶ *On wel swuðe God Ureisun of God Almihti* (UrG) is 3½ folios,⁷ *On Lofsong of ure Lefdi* (LLe) 3 folios,⁸ and *On Lofsong of ure Louerde* (LLo) 3½ folios.⁹

Written for a monastic audience, the male-voiced *On God Ureisun of Ure Lefdi* (UrL) was likely the earliest of the Wooing Group prayers to be composed. A fragment of *On Lofsong of Ure Lefdi* (LLe) is found at the end of Royal 71.A.xxvii, one of the earliest of the Katherine Group manuscripts (c.1225–30), which does not contain *Hali Meidhad*. LLe may, therefore, have been copied before *Hali Meidhad* was composed.¹⁰ *On Lofsong of ure Louerde* (LLo) was probably a source for a passage in *Hali Meidhad*.¹¹ This would make these three prayers among the earliest of the anchoritic texts, pre-dating both *Hali Meidhad* and *Ancrene Wisse*. These earliest three Wooing Group prayers (and possibly UrG as well) thus come very early indeed in the process of the gathering together of textual support for the anchoritic life of their female readers, possibly at the request of the

anchoresses themselves, who needed prayers to supplement the Hours which they had written out by hand.

The *Wohunge* itself, on the other hand, was composed very late in the process, and perhaps this accounts for the many differences between its profound affective theology and the stiffer, more ‘conventional’ tone of the earlier prayers. We know little of the early circulation of the *Wohunge*, although it must have circulated with *On wel swuðe God Ureisun of God Almihti* (UrG) at one time, since both are incorporated into the fourteenth-century *A Talkyng of the Love of God*.¹² It is, however, clear that the *Wohunge* was the last of the group to be written, post-dating the revision of *Ancrene Wisse*.¹³

The *Wohunge* itself survives only in Titus, which, although one of the latest of the *Ancrene Wisse* manuscripts, is nevertheless a crucial witness, providing evidence of the adaptation of *Ancrene Wisse* for a broader audience even than the ‘20 or more’ anchoresses of the revision – in the ten to twenty years since the first suggestions of revision in Cleopatra, the text has circulated beyond the confines of the anchoritic community, and been altered for a mixed audience that included male readers (the Titus exemplar) and a mixed audience of lay readers (Titus itself).¹⁴ It seems clear, then, that coming at the end of this long and complex textual tradition, the *Wohunge* represents not the young and virginal audience implied by *Hali Meidhad* (or, indeed, texts like Thomas of Hales’s *Luv Rone*),¹⁵ and assumed by many scholars of *Ancrene Wisse*’s original version. Instead, the *Wohunge*’s audience would be more like the broader audience of *Ancrene Wisse*’s revision, which included an entire community of anchoresses who came from various backgrounds.

Anne Savage’s recent re-examination of the process of revising *Ancrene Wisse* suggests important considerations for the later composition and audience of the *Wohunge*.¹⁶ Savage argues that *Ancrene Wisse* was composed, not only near the end of the textual process (followed only by the *Wohunge*), but also at the height of the anchoresses’ careers, rather than at the beginning. It is often assumed that, at the request of the original three sisters, *Ancrene Wisse* was written shortly after their enclosure, while they were still ‘in the flower of their youth’. This assumption is based on the oft-quoted passage in Nero (‘Muche word is of ou hu gentile wummen 3e beoð. vorgodleic & for ureoleic izirned of monie. & sustren of one ueder & of one moder. i ne blostme of ower zuweðe uorheten alle wor[l]des blissen; & bicomen ancren’),¹⁷ and reinforced by Salu’s 1955 translation, which reads:

There is much talk of you, how you are women of gentle birth, sisters, with the same father and the same mother, once much sought after on account of your

goodness and beauty, having now, in the flower of your youth, renounced all the pleasures of the world and become anchoresses.¹⁸

Wada's interpretation is fairly typical: she quotes Salu and continues, 'the sisters had led a secular, high life *recently*, since *Ancrene Wisse* includes many examples from worldly affairs ...' (emphasis mine).¹⁹ Robertson's translation is better:

There is much talk about what noble women you are, sought after for your goodness and generosity, and sisters of one father and one mother. In the blossom of your youth, you forsook all the bliss of the world and became anchoresses.²⁰

This reading reflects the original author's indication that his readers had become anchoresses 'in the flower of [their] youth' but does not add the assumption that they are still young and inexperienced (which the original does not imply). Thus, *Ancrene Wisse* need not have been written in response to the urgent need of newly enclosed anchoresses for a guide to their new lives. Rather, as Savage argues, *Ancrene Wisse* was more likely written (and revised) when the original audience had matured in the anchoritic life enough to become models for other anchoresses – or, as Savage puts it, the lives of the three sisters were not modelled upon *Ancrene Wisse*, but rather, *Ancrene Wisse* was modelled upon the lives of the three sisters. Thus, '[f]rom the anchoritic sisters, "Begging their director for a rule for a long time" is clearly driven by something other than ignorance of how an anchoress should conduct her life.'²¹ Indeed, 'the writer insists that he is not writing this book for its apparent audience.'²² Savage argues

that *Ancrene Wisse* was not written as an instructional manual for the three sister-anchoresses who appear to have comprised its original audience/readership, and then the larger group of solitaires following their example; I propose that while a wider range of sources provided its basis, it was written both *about* and *with* these anchoresses; that a very great part of its intention was to take the founding sisters and their lives as models for the others who had followed their example by the time of writing, and others who would in the future become anchoresses ... They conveyed their needs, desires and situation in a way that requires our attention in any question of authorship here – by any combination of written revisions, speech, and most forcefully of all, by living the perilous anchoritic life successfully in the writer's eyes.²³

Savage concludes that the necessity for *Ancrene Wisse* was not, in the first instance, the enclosure of the three sisters, but the growth of the

‘community of solitaires’ whose existence had expanded even further by the time the *Corpus* manuscript was written.²⁴ Indeed, she suggests that ‘the women who used it were, directly or indirectly, significantly responsible for the organization and recomposition of this material’.²⁵

Composed after this revision, the *Wohunge* would have been written for this wider ‘community of solitaires’ in order to fill the need for a more detailed, and more demanding, devotional exercise than that provided either by the Passion meditation in *Ancrene Wisse* VII or in the Wooing Group prayers. And if, as Savage argues, the anchoresses themselves had input into the revision of *Ancrene Wisse*, they might well have also had some influence on the content and form of the *Wohunge*, written to fill a gap in their devotional reading. The *Wohunge*, then, was likely written not only for, but with this community of anchoresses. Perhaps it is even not beyond the realm of speculation that it was written by one of them, although of course there is little evidence either way. At the very least, this audience would have influenced the *Wohunge*’s composition simply by creating the demand for such a text, but their influence may have been even more direct.

Text and Audience: Rethinking the anchoress

In the early thirteenth century a growing movement of lay devotion sparked an increase in the demand both for a place for lay men and women in religious orders and for devotional texts in the vernacular. The fact that the demand for a devout life far outstripped the availability of spaces in religious orders led to the growth (especially on the Continent) of religious confraternities, Tertiary Orders, lay movements like the beguines and laypeople working in hospitals or almshouses in a ‘semi-religious’ life.²⁶ In thirteenth-century England, however, for women at least, there were few alternatives to the convent, and the rising demand for the contemplative life led to an increase in women seeking the life of the anchoress.²⁷

Much of this expansion may have been due to the desire of aristocratic widows for a life of religious seclusion. Like the secular widows who retreated to convents or hospitals in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, widows in the thirteenth century sometimes withdrew to the anchoritic cell. In the case of anchoresses, however, their dedication to the life of prayer and meditation was characterized by solitude and withdrawal from the world, rather than the exchange of one community (the active, secular world) for another (the life of the convent or hospital). While Millett has argued that enclosure might not always have been by choice, it was also

often freely chosen and clearly thought out.²⁸ This seems particularly true of two women who were connected with the region (and time) in which *Ancrene Wisse* and the *Wohunge* were written, Annora de Braose Mortimer and her sister, Loretta, Countess of Leicester. To be clear, I am not suggesting that Annora and her sister(s) were the original audience for *Ancrene Wisse* or, indeed, any of the anchoritic texts. There is no evidence of a direct connection between the de Braose sisters and *Ancrene Wisse*, although Dobson has suggested that the French translation of *Ancrene Wisse* may have been composed in the first instance for Annora.²⁹ And, indeed, we do know that one copy of *Ancrene Wisse*, Cleopatra, did belong to another powerful Marcher lady, Matilda de Clare, in the late thirteenth century.³⁰ The de Braose sisters do, however, provide an example of the *kind* of audience for which the anchoritic texts, and the *Wohunge* in particular, might have been written – wealthy, aristocratic, highly placed and well-educated women who sought the anchorhold in their widowhood, and whose concerns are reflected in the practicality, imagery and complexity of the *Wohunge*.

The de Braose family were amongst the most powerful of the Marcher nobility in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.³¹ They were also notable patrons of religious houses: Annora and Loretta's parents, William de Braose and his wife Maude (or Matilda) de Braose, were patrons of Glastonbury and other religious foundations in the border marches, and Maud's family, the St Valerys, were patrons of, amongst others, the convent at Godstow, near Oxford. The elder de Braoses' patronage and religious connections clearly extended into the next generation. Annora and Loretta's sister, Flandrina, was a nun (and later abbess) at Godstow; their brother, Giles, was bishop of Worcester; and another sister, Margery de Lacy, founded a convent at Aconbury.³²

The lives of the de Braose sisters were not characterized by ease and security. Their mother Maud, along with their eldest brother William, was condemned to death by King John in 1210 after their father had fled to France (where he later died in exile). Giles was also exiled at the time of his mother and brother's imprisonment (1208–13) and went to Paris, where he befriended Stephen Langton, the exiled archbishop of Canterbury. Loretta's lands were seized and she, already a widow, may have gone into exile with her brother and father in Paris.³³ Annora was imprisoned from 1210 to 1214. The imagery of enclosure as penitential suffering, imprisonment and exile would surely have resonated with these two women.

There were, of course, many reasons to seek out religious seclusion in widowhood. A noble widow was subject to the demands of remarriage, and

may also have been seen as a potential threat by her husband's heirs or competition by their wives. In the cases of Annora and Loretta, both childless, the heirs to their husbands' estates would have had even less reason to welcome them than if they had been their own sons or daughters. More important, for both women religious seclusion also provided a form of political sanctuary, away from the teeming intrigues of their parents for which Annora had suffered imprisonment, and Loretta exile. Loretta's return to England and the restoration of her lands (1214/15) seem to have been permitted under the condition that she would not remarry, and she was enclosed at Hackington, Kent (near Canterbury) in 1220 or 1221, after settling her financial affairs.³⁴ Annora, widowed in 1227, similarly settled her finances, ensured adequate provision for her life as an anchoress and entered the anchorhold at Iffley (near Oxford) in 1232. For both women, the anchorhold offered political and social shelter, as well as religious seclusion.

It is, however, important not to discount the obvious reason for withdrawal to the anchorhold – a sincere desire to seek the devout life of prayer and meditation, and to prepare the soul for the afterlife, while at the same time interceding for the souls of family and friends, living and dead. It is unlikely that a wealthy aristocratic widow like Annora de Braose Mortimer or the Countess of Leicester would have chosen an anchorhold over a convent simply as a political or social refuge. Both the de Braose sisters had the means to enter a convent of their choosing, and they had familial connections to at least two: Aconbury (founded by Margery in 1218, before either were enclosed), and Godstow (where Flandrina was already a nun).

Nevertheless, relations between the de Braose family and the religious houses under their patronage were not always peaceful. For example, at the time that Annora would have been arranging for her enclosure, Margery was engaged in a heated debate with the Hospitallers (to whom she had entrusted the foundation of her convent at Aconbury), which ended with her refounding the establishment under the Austin Friars. Flandrina was, indeed, created abbess of Godstow in 1241 (about the time of Annora's death), but was deposed in 1248 by Robert Grosseteste, bishop of Lincoln. There is no evidence of why she was removed from office, or, indeed, of her life at Godstow in any form, apart from these two events. But Godstow and Aconbury would not have been the only convents available to the de Braose sisters, had they sought refuge in a community of nuns. One must, therefore, consider that their choice of the anchorhold was prompted by a true desire for the secluded life of the anchoress, rather than the communal life of the nun.³⁵ And, indeed, Loretta's later patronage of the Franciscans

suggests that personal devotion may well have been a motive for her enclosure.

Indeed, the anchorhold may have been attractive precisely because it was *not* a convent, and therefore its inhabitant was not subject to the vows or rule of the convent life. A woman who, in her widowhood, desired to withdraw from the secular world and pursue a devout life, had few options in the early thirteenth century: essentially, she was limited to the extremes of the solitude of the anchorhold or the communal life of the convent.³⁶ The anchorhold would have offered the kind of seclusion without religious vows appropriate for a lay widow who wished to retire to a life of devotion but not to take on the formal life of the convent. And the anchorhold would have provided some degree of independence. Indeed, although, as Millett suggests, *Ancrene Wisse* betrays its audience's anxiety about their liminal status, neither lay nor religious, bound by no rule, yet identified with no order, that very marginality may have been part of its attraction.³⁷

The picture that emerges of the audience for a text like the *Wohunge* is thus complex. The original readers would, to be sure, have been anchoresses; but they would also likely have been aristocratic, literate and intelligent women, who had led active, and perhaps powerful, lives in the lay world before retiring to the anchorhold.³⁸ They may have been the widows of powerful and influential men – indeed, like Annora and Loretta, they may have retired to the anchorhold to minimize any residual effect of that influence that others may have perceived as a threat. They may have been seeking refuge as well as seclusion. And they would have brought with them the influences, experiences and some of the accoutrements of the world which they had left behind. It is difficult to imagine, for example, that wealthy aristocratic women like the de Braose sisters would not have brought at least some books and devotional images with them to the anchorhold, however austere their cell might have, in theory, been.

Having chosen such a life, however, the devout laywoman (widow or maid) required a literature to support it. Warren has charted the details of women's efforts to secure the institutional and financial support which were necessary to enter into the life of the anchoress.³⁹ But a literary context was also necessary for a life that was grounded in the withdrawal from the world, yet not governed by any 'rule'. Literature for monks abounded: rules, sermons, meditations and theological treatises of all kinds could be drawn upon to support the monastic life. Nuns could and did read and benefit from the same literature, and were also able, to some extent, to develop a literary tradition of their own, as witnessed by the nuns of Barking in the late twelfth century.⁴⁰ For anchoresses, however, there was little literary

support for the lifestyle they had chosen. Aelred of Rievaulx's *De Institutione Inclusarum*, or *Rule for a Recluse*, one of the sources upon which the author of *Ancrene Wisse* drew, was among the first literature written exclusively for anchoresses; Goscelin's *Letter* to Eve of Wilton was another. The addressees of these texts, however, had come to the anchorhold via the convent. This had important implications. As professional religious, both Aelred's sister and Eve of Wilton were literate in Latin and could draw upon the devotional and meditative literature of their time to structure their devotional lives and to supplement the instruction contained in their 'Rules'. Indeed, they were already supplied with a rule and a literature that had structured their lives in the convent. Both Aelred's *Rule* and Goscelin's *Letter* were supplements to an already existing body of literature, intended to build upon a form of religious life that had already been mastered as they instructed their readers in the higher form of solitude which they had undertaken. Thus, the texts written by Aelred and Goscelin would have been used to focus their readers on the ways in which the solitude of the anchorhold augmented and deepened the devotional lives that they already led. Rooted in the life and literature of the convent, for Aelred and Goscelin's readers, the anchorhold was the extension and pinnacle (albeit a rare and demanding one) of a life that they had chosen and trained for from youth, and, moreover, a life that had opened to them an entire literature of devotion.

For the anchoresses to whom *Ancrene Wisse* was addressed, and for women like Annora and Loretta, however, the anchoritic life was arrived at by a quite different route. These women moved directly from the lay world into the anchorhold, whether in their youth (as with the three sisters to whom *Ancrene Wisse* was originally addressed), or in their widowhood (as with Annora and Loretta). For these women, literate in the vernacular(s)⁴¹ but not in Latin, the Latin literature of monastery and convent would have been inaccessible (and, indeed, inappropriate). But before *Ancrene Wisse*, there were no guides or 'rules' for the anchoritic life in the vernacular, and little literature to support the life of prayer and meditation which these women had undertaken. It is in this context in which the anchoritic texts must be seen: not only as the beginning of a flourishing movement of vernacular theology, but at a pivotal moment in time, when the demand for vernacular theological writings was growing, but when there were no texts available to meet that demand. Addressed to an audience of women who occupied the shadowy perimeters of both the religious and secular worlds, anchoresses who were neither true 'religious', belonging to no order or conventual context, nor truly 'lay', having taken vows of seclusion and

entered into an anchoritic cell which cut them off, metaphorically if not literally, from the secular world which lay just outside their windows,⁴² the *Wohunge* must also be seen in the context of the increasing desire of lay men and, particularly, women to participate in the devotional life of prayer and meditation.⁴³ Yet it is not merely an adaptation of complex theological and devotional material for an audience that prefers emotion to intellect, romance to theology. It is addressed to an intelligent, literate and aristocratic audience, capable of appreciating its complex structure and nuanced layers of metaphor. How, then, did the needs of anchoresses and other readers in the ‘margins’ between the lay and religious worlds shape the development of the texts written for them and, specifically, the composition and use of a text like the *Wohunge*?

*The Anchoress’s Reading Material:
the Wohunge as a Response to Demand*

Ancrene Wisse itself is a true compendium, ideally suited to its readers’ needs: it leads the anchoresses through their daily devotions, counsels them on the details of the enclosed life (what could they eat? what should they wear? could they keep a cow?), and, most importantly, develops the inner spiritual lives to which their solitude would be devoted. Yet, as the author himself acknowledges, this ‘guide’ alone is not enough. The spiritual life, and the prayer and meditation upon which it is grounded, is best built through devotional reading. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* cannot conceive of the life of prayer unsupported by devout reading, and even counsels his beloved sisters to pray less, that they may read more.

However, the anchoresses for whom the *Ancrene Wisse* author wrote did not have a wide stock of vernacular texts to draw upon to feed their spiritual *lectio*. We know from *Ancrene Wisse* itself that the original recipients owned several books in English and French, among them an ‘English Book of St Margaret’ (perhaps the Life of St Margaret included in the Katherine Group), a book which sounds very like *Hali Meidhad*, and possibly *Sawles Warde*. In the early thirteenth century, such vernacular books of devotion were rare, yet the rising popularity of the anchoritic life amongst aristocratic women clearly created a demand for such works, in both English and French.⁴⁴

Women entering the anchorhold would have brought with them their past reading, if not the books themselves. In their secular lives they would likely have read, if not owned, Psalters, saints’ lives, and contemporary

romances. Even the texts of the Katherine Group reflect some of the worldly experiences that a devout widow might have brought to the anchorhold. Using the allegory of the noble household, *Sawles Warde* reminded the reader of her responsibility to rule her body and mind, and the eternal consequences of success or failure. Saints' lives provided models for perseverance in temptation and adversity, for dedication to prayer and meditation, for confidence in Christ's intervention (even in the prison/anchorhold when life was at its bleakest), and sources of inspiration and intercessors to turn to in time of need. In some cases, saints' lives may also have provided for the possibility of adventure and romance, transformed from the secular romance of court and castle to the religious romance of the court of heaven.⁴⁵ The combination of courtly romance and the *imitatio Christi* of the saints' lives would have been an ideal background for a text such as the *Wohunge*. Only *Hali Meidhad* was addressed specifically to virgins, but even this could provide an aristocratic widow with encouragement in the maintenance of the life of chastity, and a reminder that the secular life had its own difficulties and dangers.

A pressing need which remained unfulfilled by these texts was a way to structure daily prayers and devotions. Like the devout layperson of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, these women would have had enough Latin to recite the basic prayers of the canonical hours, the Credo, the Ave, and the Pater Noster.⁴⁶ Anchoresses may have brought a Psalter with them to the anchorhold, but they would have written their 'Hours' on pamphlets or scrolls,⁴⁷ and they were instructed to have whatever else they needed (such as prayers, graces or hymns) written out for them.⁴⁸ The anchoresses would also have listened to the Hours of the priest in the church adjoining their cell.

However, 'the anchoresses are also encouraged to use their own devotions'⁴⁹ and by far the most important reading material, therefore, is that which structures individual prayer and meditation, focusing the mind and senses on the One whom the reader seeks in her cell, and for whom she has withdrawn from the world. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* continually advises his readers to flee to the Cross through prayer, meditation and holy reading. Indeed, the encouragement of *Hali Meidhad* to persevere in the chaste life, the models of the saints of dedication to their divine Beloved through torment and adversity, and *Sawles Warde's* promise of eternal bliss with the heavenly Bridegroom are all predicated on the same goal: devotion to and union with Christ, consummated in heaven, but prefigured on earth through prayer and meditation.⁵⁰

It is here that the texts of the Wooing Group would have entered into the equation. The earliest four Wooing Group prayers may have been

composed and copied to fill the anchoresses' need for vernacular prayers in the Anselmian manner. Yet the most effective means of union with the heavenly spouse is found in the affective participation in his Passion through meditation upon the great love evident in his suffering and death, and the prayerful response of love which that meditation evokes. Nearly two centuries later, the author of *The Tree and the Twelve Fruits of the Holy Ghost* was more fortunate in his resources: the spread of Franciscan devotion meant that vernacular theology was widely available, and he could recommend meditation upon Christ's Passion in general as a genre with which his readers would be familiar, and the *Stimulus Amoris* (long available in Middle English translation as *The Prickynge of Love*) in particular as a text to which they would have had ready access.⁵¹ The author of *Ancrene Wisse*, however, has no body of literature to which to refer his readers, and must include his own version of Passion meditation in the parable of the Christ-knight in the penultimate and climactic Part 7 of his text. In this light, it is significant that although structurally the four shorter prayers of the Wooing Group found in Nero provide a balance between devotion to the Virgin Mary and to Christ (providing two prayers to each), the main focus of the prayers themselves is the Passion. Even *On Lofsong of Ure Lefdi* (LLe) is essentially a form of confession followed by a request for the Virgin's intercession based on the elements of Christ's Passion, a short outline of a Passion meditation similar to those that accompany the later Arma Christi images. And while the author of *Ancrene Wisse* holds the Virgin Mary up as a model throughout the text, it is meditation upon Christ's Passion that is most often recommended to his readers.⁵² Yet, in the end, the readers of *Ancrene Wisse* are ultimately left without the kind of 'stand alone' meditation that could guide them through their contemplation of the Passion and the appropriate responses.

The *Wohunge* fills this gap admirably. While it draws upon the parable of the Christ-knight in *Ancrene Wisse* 7, it expands that parable into a full-fledged meditation on Christ's suitability as the reader's beloved spouse, the Passion which displays his love so eloquently, and the inevitable response of grateful love which the reader must find in her own heart. In so doing, the *Wohunge* combines the Anselmian pattern of prayer, characterized by the metaphorical withdrawal into the chamber of the heart (here figured by the anchoress's literal withdrawal into the anchorhold) with the Bernardine affective devotion to the heavenly bridegroom in a vernacular text which makes such devotion available to any literate reader.

Anselm's *Orationes sive Meditationes* (Prayers and Meditations), many of which were written for devout laypeople, were, as Savage and Watson

(1991) point out, an 'important ancestor of the whole of the *Wooing* group'. They continue, 'The tone distinctive to Anselmian meditation is that of the impassioned soliloquy, as a speaker argues, exclaims, prays and uses highly patterned language to induce in herself or himself a deeper realization of Christian truths; this is just the tone which *Wohunge* also strives to achieve for the same purpose.'⁵³ The true achievement of the *Wohunge*, however, is in its combination of Anselmian prayer with the bridal imagery of Bernard of Clairvaux and the continental women mystics.⁵⁴ In so doing, the *Wohunge* draws together threads from the looms of both secular and religious devotion to weave a new text for readers who lived in margins between the life of the secular world and the world of the professional religious.

But the *Wohunge* is more than 'just' an anchoritic text. It is the first text in Middle English which provides a meditation on Christ's Passion, its purpose and function in the life of the reader, and the appropriate devotional response. It thus stands at the beginning of a tradition of texts which become the most popular genre of vernacular writing in late medieval England.⁵⁵ Pre-dating the flowering of Franciscan literature which, it has always been assumed, 'prompted' the growth of such affective meditation on the Passion amongst the laity in late medieval England, the *Wohunge* must, nevertheless, be studied in the same context. In fact, the *Wohunge* should be seen as a link between the Anselmian and Bernardine meditations of the twelfth century and the Franciscan devotions of the late thirteenth and fourteenth century, just as it is a link between the worlds of lay and religious devotion. Written shortly after the establishment of the first Franciscan and Dominican houses in England, the *Wohunge* ought to be seen as part of the movement which brought Franciscan devotion to the vernacular reader. Indeed, Loretta, Countess of Leicester, was an important patron of the early Franciscans, and the *Wohunge* is precisely the kind of text which might have been commissioned by or written for an anchoress with a Franciscan spiritual adviser.

Passion Meditation in the Wooing Group

Having reconsidered the audience of the *Wohunge* and considered, however briefly, its place in the tradition of devotional reading, it is time to turn to the ways in which the *Wohunge*'s Passion meditation suits the needs of such an audience: devout, likely aristocratic, literate in the vernacular, intelligent, and, perhaps most important, experienced – likely widowed, rather

than virginal, having come from the lay world later in life, and bringing its experiences with them. Such an audience, with experience of the world gained before entering the anchorhold, is quite different than the young, virginal women whose experience of the world comes from reading romance and dreaming of the ideal husband. In this light, one is forced to reassess both the author's 'intent' and one's own reading of the text. The opening lines, which consist of the consideration of the ideal spouse, cannot be read as portraying the 'fantasy' ideal which would appeal to young women whose experience of life and marriage is limited. Instead, they must be read as an appeal to the practical, experienced and aristocratic lady, whose experience of marriage may not have been ideal, but is certainly realistic; for women such as Annora and Loretta de Braose, the ideal may well have been read in contrast to their own experience of their father (if not their husbands). The attributes of the ideal spouse are, above all, practical: wealth, generosity (to his spouse), wisdom to use wealth and power well, bravery and the skill to keep and hold his lands and wealth, nobility of birth and character, gentleness and high kindred. Although spiritualized, the considerations are the practical realities of a noble marriage, and although love underlies each, the attributes are presented as the purchase price of the narrator's love, in a clear assessment of their 'market value'.

After cataloguing Christ's superiority to any human spouse, the narrator asserts that over all these, Christ's painful death on the Cross 'telles riht in al mi luue, / calenges al mi heorte (rightly claims all my love, challenges all my heart).⁵⁶ Moving from the language of the market-place to the language of rightful ownership, the narrator asserts that the Passion makes Christ worthy of the reader's love, and his rightful claim is presented as a challenge to her – a challenge to recognize, and respond to, the absolute worth of Christ's love.

The *Wohunge* thus combines aristocratic dignity with practical reflection on the ideal spouse in its opening lines. But the opening lines are far more than mere reflection on the ideal spouse. They are the introduction to a complex and layered Passion meditation which, like the opening, draws heavily upon the imagery of enclosure which dominates *Ancrene Wisse* and which structures the anchoress's meditation upon Christ's life and death as a series of enclosures paralleling the anchoress's own: in Mary's womb, on the Cross and in the tomb. In so doing, it requires a close and careful reading.⁵⁷

The Passion meditation which follows retains, however, the practical and aristocratic tone of the earlier passages. The Passion is presented as a battle, where Christ fights the three foes of the world, the flesh and the devil with the three weapons of poverty, shame and pain. Here, as in the list of the

attributes of the ideal spouse, Christ is presented not as the courtly knight of romance, but as the epic hero of Anglo-Saxon battles, fighting the beasts of battle with, literally, one hand tied behind his back or, as the narrator puts it, ‘wið þi deorwurðe hond nailet on rod’ (with your precious hand nailed on the cross), plundering hell’s house and binding its dogs, and saving the soul from torment and shame.

Christ’s weapons, too, are presented in a very practical light. Christ’s poverty teaches the narrator not to fear (or regret) the poverty of the world – and, in the case of an aristocratic widow, not to fear giving up the comfort and wealth that she has lived with all her life. The restrictive walls of the anchorhold are nothing compared to Christ’s poverty at birth, when he could find only the shelter of ‘a waeles hus imiddes þe strete’ (a wall-less house in the midst of the street); its privations cannot compare to his hungers and wanderings. And even within the anchorhold, the anchoress has warm, practical clothing, where Christ had nothing to cover his body on the Cross. Christ’s free choice of poverty is the model for the free choice of poverty in the anchorhold over the wealth and status of the aristocratic life.

Christ’s second weapon, shame, is similarly compared in a practical way to the anchoress’s experience – just as Christ was condemned without guilt, and willingly suffered the multiple shames of the Passion, the anchoress learns to suffer ‘schome of wicke monnes muð for uten mine gulte’ (the shame of wicked people’s mouths when I am without guilt). One is reminded of the passage in *Ancrene Wisse* where the anchoress is told: ‘Ah ze ahen unnen þet na word ne beo of ow, ne mare þen of deade, ant beon bliðe iheortet ze ze þolieð danger of Sluri þe cokes cneawe, þe wescheð ant wipeð disches i cuchene’ (f. 103r; (Millett, 2005, p. 143) (Indeed, you ought not to allow that any word be spoken of you, no more than of the dead, and be joyful in your heart if you suffer the contempt of Slurry the cook’s boy, who washes and wipes dishes in the kitchen) translation mine). Once again, Christ’s example is not merely the model for the choice of the anchorhold, but also for the willing forfeiture not only of wealth, but also of rank and status.

Finally, Christ’s torment on the cross is not only his ultimate weapon against the devil, but his blood shed on the cross is also the ultimate purchase price of the soul: ‘A, deore cheap hefdes tu on me / ne was neuer unwurði þing chepet swa deore’ (ah, you had a costly purchase in me – never was such an unworthy thing purchased at such cost!). And, again, Christ’s earthly life of labour, and his betrayal, binding and beating are all models for the anchoress’s life.

With the Passion Meditation proper, the text switches from the deliberate (and often heavy) tone of the battle to the affective, emotional tone of devotion to the divine spouse. At the same time, the subject matter changes from the practical considerations of the attributes which make Christ a worthy spouse to the consideration of his love, expressed in the Passion which demands a response that is equally passion-ate, displaying an equally suffering love. As the anchoress contemplates the Crucifixion itself, she sees Christ's weapons displayed in his suffering – his torment, his thirst, his shame and his cold, naked body. And, at the height of her emotion, she sees the final blow – Longinus piercing Christ's side when he is already dead.

It is this final, gratuitous, act of violence which moves the anchoress most deeply, as the tone changes again, to the language of romance. With this final wound, Christ opens his heart to the eyes of the soul, 'for to cnaue wið[in]liche in to reden trewe luue lettres, / for þer i mai openlich seo hu muchel þu me luuedes' (to know it surely and to read within it true love letters, for there may I openly see how much you loved me). With this, the anchoress moves from Christ's actions of love to her own response: 'Wið wrange schuldi þe min heorte wearnen siðen þat tu bohtes herte for herte' (Wrong would it be for me to refuse you my heart, since you have bought heart for heart). For all that Christ has done to purchase the anchoress's love, it is the gift of his wounded heart that finally brings her to the appropriate response of suffering love. And while the anchoress turns to the Virgin Mary for a model of grief and love, in the end she returns to the language of the anchorhold (and the battlefield) to proclaim her own means of expressing that love:

Ihesu swete ihesu þus tu faht for me azaines mine sawle fan,
 þu me derennedes wið like,
 & makedes of me wrecche þi leofmon & spuse.
 Broht tu haues me fra þe world to bur of þi burðe,
 steked me i chaumbre.
 I mai þer þe swa sweteli kissen & cluppen,
 & of þi luue haue gastli likinge.
 A swete ihesu mi liues luue wið þi blod þu haues me boht,
 & fram þe world þu haues me broht.

(Jesus, sweet Jesus, in this way you have fought for me against the foes of my soul: you claimed me with your body, and made me, a wretch, your lover and spouse. You have brought me from the world to the bower of your birth, enclosed me in a chamber. There I may so sweetly kiss you and embrace you and of your love have spiritual delight. Ah, sweet Jesus, my life's love, with your blood you have bought me, and from the world you have brought me.)

Here, the language of romance is not merely the language of the bower, but also the language of the *body*. With his body, Christ has both purchased and redeemed the anchoress's body, and her response is as bodily as his own demonstration of love in the Passion. Her love is expressed in her bower, and with her body, hanging beside Christ on the Cross in her enclosure, which becomes a daily *imitatio Christi* as the metaphor is literalized.⁵⁸

Yet still, the anchoress is aware that bodily suffering is not enough: 'Bote swete ihesu hwat mai mi bodi aʒaines tin?' (But, sweet Jesus, what might my body be against yours?). She remembers that the piercing of Christ's body is, most significantly, the opening of his heart, and so she concludes:

*And ʒet ich haue an heorte unwrest & unwurði & westi & poure of alle gode
þeawes & tat swuch
as hit is,
tac hit to þe nu leue lif wið treowe luuenesse, &
ne þole me neuwer nan oðer þing aʒain þi wille luuie,
for ne mai ich nowhwer mi luue bettre sette þen o þe ihesu crist þat bohtes hit
swa dere.
Nis nan swa wurði to beo luued as tu swete ihesu þat in þe haues alle þing hwer
fore mon ah beo
luuewurði to oðer.
þu art best wurð mi luue þat for mi luue deidest.*

(And still I have an infirm, and unworthy heart, destitute poor in all good virtues, and that, such as it is, take it to you now, beloved life, with true love, and never suffer me to love any other thing against your will, For I may nowhere set my love better than on you, Jesus Christ, who have bought it so dearly. Nothing, then, is so worthy to be loved as you, sweet Jesus, who have all things in you for which a man might be worthy of another's love. You who have died for my love are most worthy of my love.)

It is ironic that, after this impassioned assertion of the worthiness of Christ, and his fulfilment of the most stringent of all the conditions for the ideal spouse, the narrator returns, albeit briefly, to the issue of the purchase price of the soul. In a final moment of extreme practicality, she considers that even with all Christ has given, her loving response will ensure one final gift: a crown in heaven to rule beside him for ever. Each of Christ's three 'weapons' is, of course, spiritualized, just as the attributes of the ideal spouse are. Christ's poverty purchases wealth in heaven; his shame purchases honour, and his blood purchases salvation. Christ's modelling of the anchoress's enclosure thus also models her reward in heaven. Yet, common as this theme is, it would also resound in the minds of aristocratic widows

like the de Braose sisters: for all the wealth, rank, prestige, comfort and power they have renounced in entering the anchorhold, there is a heavenly reward that surpasses it all – but which can be expressed and understood in the language of their own lives and experiences.

The re-examination of the audience of the *Wohunge* (and, perhaps, all of the anchoritic texts) forces the twenty-first-century reader to re-examine her own assumptions about both the genre and the content of this impassioned text. The *Wohunge* is no mere ‘dumbing down’ of affective devotion for readers who might have been more familiar with romance than theology. The lover-knight is no moonstruck gallant whose love has overcome his reason (like Chrétien de Troyes’s Lancelot), and the lady-soul is no wide-eyed *ingénue*, waiting in her tower to be swept off her feet and carried off into the sunset. The anchoritic readers who are instructed by the author of *Ancrene Wisse* to treat the inner rule as a lady and the outer rule as a servant had direct experience of the complexities of running an aristocratic household, and the *Wohunge*’s female narrator who meditates on the choice of a spouse to defend and maintain the castle of the soul is well aware of the qualities she seeks. And, while she may be motivated by devotion, there is also an element of self-preservation – she needs a defender who is strong, brave and wealthy as much as she needs a lover who is handsome, generous and debonair.

Having experienced the life of a thirteenth-century aristocratic lady and (possibly) widow, many of the *Wohunge*’s readers would understand the meditation upon Christ’s sufferings and death with a depth that we, perhaps, could not imagine. Christ’s poverty would be compared not only to their own situation as anchoresses, but to their previous situation as affluent ladies, relinquished for his sake; his ability to save them from the enemies of their souls not only to their spiritual isolation and temptation, but to the worldly power that they have abdicated, recognizing its inadequacy in the battle for the soul; his pain and suffering not only to their ascetic life in the anchorhold, but the life of comfort renounced for his love. We must assume a maturity of outlook far removed from what we have come to think of as the ‘reader of romance’, the maidenly anchoress or the inexperienced girl, cloistered and sheltered from the world. Rather, we should think of the readers of the *Wohunge* as sophisticated, educated, aristocratic and awe-inspiring women, who, after experiencing a full, rich and, possibly, rewarding life in the world, have turned away from all that life has to offer and chosen the solitude of the anchorhold – bringing with them all that they have learned from the world, and fully understanding what they are leaving. Yet we must also keep in mind that the anchoritic texts quickly found

their way into lay hands, and that the *Wohunge* itself was likely also read by lay women. For these women, still enmeshed in the world and its cares, their withdrawal would be limited to the solitude of the chamber of the heart – no less resonant for being a withdrawal from which they must emerge daily to cope with the demands of their earthly lives.

In other words, we must beware of underestimating the audience of the *Wohunge*. Devotionally literate, likely well read in the vernacular, and knowledgeable about the ways of the world, these women would have brought formidable talents and a strong will to their reading. And the *Wohunge*, with its sophisticated imagery, layered and nuanced spirituality, and impassioned language, is a text worthy of such a readership. Religious or lay, these are women who would have responded in kind to the scribe/author's final words:

Prei for me mi leue suster. þis haue i writen þe for þi þat wordes ofte quemen þe heorte to þenken on ure lauerd And for þi hwen þu art on eise carpe to ward ihesu seie þise wordes. þenc as tah he heng biside þe blodi up o rode. And he þurh his grace opene þin heorte to his luue to reowðe of his pine

(Pray for me, my dear sister. I have written this for you, because words often inspire⁵⁹ the heart to think on our Lord. And therefore, when you are at leisure, speak to Jesus, and say these words, and imagine that he hangs beside you, bloody upon the cross. And he through his grace will open your heart to his love, and to pity for his pain.)

Notes

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¹ Like later texts originally addressed to religious women (such as Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* and Rolle's *Form of Living*), *Ancrene Wisse* was adapted and adopted by a wider lay audience, moving rapidly from the narrow context of the anchorhold into the broader context of lay devotion. Indeed, Hilton, Rolle and other vernacular writers of spiritual guidance and devotional literature inherit and draw upon the tradition founded by the author of *Ancrene Wisse*, whose text stands at the beginning of several important genres of later vernacular theology. The importance of *Ancrene Wisse* as a testament to the development of lay spirituality in England has recently been the subject of a number of studies: Bella Millett has outlined its relationship to later Books of Hours; Robert Hazenfratz has written about its influence on lay asceticism; and Cate Gunn has written about its influence on sermon litera-

ture. Gunn also comments on the parallels between the anchoress's devotions in Part I of *Ancrene Wisse* and the development of the Rosary, a parallel which finds echoes in the function of the *Wohunge* as Passion meditation. *Ancrene Wisse*'s influence on later penitential manuals, treatments of temptation, guidance literature for nuns and the figure of the Christ-knight have all been commented on. All of these studies have noted the historical position of *Ancrene Wisse* at a pivotal moment in the development of vernacular theology. It is in this context that the *Wohunge* must be studied. See Bella Millett, *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402, with Variants from Other Manuscripts*. EETS os 325, ed. Bella Millett (London: Oxford University Press, 2005); Robert Hasenfratz, "'Efter Hire Euene": lay audiences and the variable aestheticism of *Ancrene Wisse*', in *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs: Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), pp. 145–60; and Cate Gunn, 'Beyond the tomb: *Ancrene Wisse* and lay piety', in *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs: Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages*, pp. 161–71.

² Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson (eds and trans.), *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), p. 29.

³ BL Cotton Titus D.xviii. Titus is written in double columns; the text of the *Wohunge* from the top of col. 2 on f. 127r, to 132v, col. 2, thus taking up 11 columns.

⁴ BL Cotton Nero A.xiv.

⁵ So titled in the Nero manuscript, ff. 120v–123v. I have listed the texts in the order in which they appear in Nero, and included abbreviations to help avoid confusion between texts whose titles are frustratingly similar. I have, however, used different abbreviations from those used by Shepherd (1959), whose abbreviations are based on translated titles. Following Allen (2006) I have treated the texts in Nero as forming two balanced pairs: an *Ureison* to *Ure Lefdi* (UrLe), followed by an *Ureison* to *God* (UrG), and a *Lofsong* to *Ure Lefdi* (LLe) followed by a *Lofsong* to *Ure Louerde* (LLo).

⁶ *On God Ureisun of ure Lefdi* (UrLe) is often not included in the Wooing Group of texts as, unlike the others, it is written in the male voice (and is not, for this reason, translated by Savage and Watson). However, it is included at the head of the Wooing Group texts in Nero, suggesting that it circulated with them (and may, indeed, have been a model for them). Charlotte Allen, in an unpublished paper (4–7 May 2006, 41st International Congress on Medieval Studies, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI), has argued that the four texts as they are presented in Nero also form two distinct and balancing sets of prayers addressed to Christ and Mary. This suggests that Savage and Watson's comment that they were simply added to Nero to fill 'a few spare folios' of the manuscript following *Ancrene Wisse*, and that 'they therefore seem to have been regarded, relatively speaking, as ephemera' (p. 29) needs to be reassessed. Savage and Watson affirm that 'all the surviving Wooing-group works are carefully constructed and well-written compositions in a genre, that of Anselm's *Prayers and Meditations*, which was taken highly seriously in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Nonetheless, each individual work could easily have been written quickly, to meet some particular need ...

there is ... little evidence that the works in the Wooing group were regarded as forming the kind of collection Bodley and Royal preserve of the *Katherine-Group works*' (pp. 335–6, n. 30). This may be so, but the scribe of Nero clearly felt that the four Wooing Group works he included in his text formed a coherent and well-ordered group of prayers, suitable for the readers who would use his copy of *Ancrene Wisse*.

- ⁷ So titled in the manuscript, Nero, ff. 123v–126v. A fragment is also found in Lambeth Palace MS 487, ff. 65v–67r, which Thompson (1958) calls *Ureisun of ure Louerde*. Savage and Watson (1991) translate this text as 'An Orison to God Almighty'.
- ⁸ Nero, ff. 126v–128r, without rubric or title; the title is Thompson's (1958). A fragment also survives in BL Royal MS 17.A.xxvii, where it is titled *be Oreisun of Seinte Marie*. Savage and Watson (1991) have used this title, 'An Orison to St Mary', for their translation of this text.
- ⁹ Nero, ff. 128r–131r, with no rubric or title; the title is Thompson's (1958). Savage and Watson (1991) translate this text as 'A Song of Praise to Our Lord'. In order to avoid confusion, however, I have retained Thompson's title, using *Ureisun* for the two first texts in Nero, and *Lofsong* for the second pair. I have also included abbreviations to help avoid confusion between texts whose titles are frustratingly similar.
- ¹⁰ The *Lofsong* or, as Royal calls it, *Orison* is on the last folio and breaks off mid-sentence at the end of the leaf. Shepherd points out that this text is an alliterative prose paraphrase of a Latin verse prayer by Marbod of Rennes (1959, xiii). Savage and Watson suggest that since Royal does not contain *Hali Meidhad*, it may have been copied before that text was written. This would make this prayer (and whichever other prayers Royal might have contained) among the earliest of the anchoritic texts (p. 333, n. 12).
- ¹¹ Bella Millett, *Hali Meidhad*, EETS os 284 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. xx–xxi. See also Savage and Watson, p. 415, n. 37.
- ¹² See Savage and Watson, p. 336, n. 30. See also M. Salvina Westra (ed.), *A Talkyng of þe Loue of God* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950).
- ¹³ It is generally agreed that *Ancrene Wisse* was originally written sometime after 1215 (the Fourth Lateran Council) and (based on a passage referring to the friars) revised sometime after 1225, when the first Franciscans arrived in England. If Millett is correct in her argument that the original author was Dominican, however, then the original composition must be moved forward to after 1221, when the first Dominicans arrived in England, and the revision must have taken place later. The revision of *Ancrene Wisse* occurred after the copying of the Cleopatra manuscript (probably in the early 1230s) which contains the author's notes which are incorporated into the Corpus revision. The *Wohunge* would have been composed sometime between the copying of the Cleopatra manuscript and the Titus manuscript (in the 1240s). See Millett, *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition*, pp. xiii–xxiv and Millett, *Ancrene Wisse, The Katherine Group, and the Wooing Group*, pp. 7–13.
- ¹⁴ As Savage and Watson point out, the context and structure of the Titus manuscript itself deserve attention, as it is carefully structured to guide the reader through a

series of devotional texts. Titus, they write, ‘attempts to be a one-volume library of the anchoritic works, gathering into a single, well-organized collection *Ancrene Wisse*, the three most important Katherine-group works [HM, SW and SK], and one work from the Wooing group, *The Wooing of Our Lord* itself’ (p. 12). They suggest that Titus may have been written in the Franciscan house in Hereford, founded in 1228, whose friars were later confessors to the nuns at Limebrook. Allen (2006) comments that in the Titus version of *Ancrene Wisse*, ‘the occasional use of the word *servaunt* instead of *spuse*’ emphasizes that ‘the reader need not be literally a bride of Christ but anyone who wished to attain the passionate ... attachment to Christ’s person’ found in the *Wohunge*.

- ¹⁵ In this context, it is interesting to compare the *Wohunge* to the (only slightly later) *Luv Rone* of Thomas of Hales. Hales is clearly addressing a nun and, unlike *Ancrene Wisse* and, I will argue, the *Wohunge*, his text is not adaptable for a lay audience. As well, Hales looks back to an older tradition of meditation, employing the *ubi sunt* theme familiar from Anglo-Saxon poetry, and stressing the importance of virginity. The *Wohunge*, as I shall argue, looks *forward* to a new vernacular tradition of devotional texts, which are adapted and adopted for lay audiences.
- ¹⁶ Anne Savage, ‘The communal authorship of *Ancrene Wisse*’, in *A Companion to Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Yoko Wada (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), pp. 45–56.
- ¹⁷ Nero in Mabel Day (ed.), *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwe, Cotton Nero A.XIV*, EETS os 225, ed. Mabel Day (London: Oxford University Press, 1952).
- ¹⁸ M. B. Salu (trans.), *The Ancrewe Riwe* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1955 and 1990), p. 85, f. 30.
- ¹⁹ Salu, p. 84.
- ²⁰ Yoko Wada (ed.), *A Companion to Ancrene Wisse* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), p. 4.
- ²¹ Elizabeth Robertson, ‘Savoring “scientia”: the medieval anchoress reads *Ancrene Wisse*’, in *A Companion to Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Yoko Wada (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), pp. 113–44 (pp. 121–2).
- ²² Savage, ‘The communal authorship of *Ancrene Wisse*’, p. 50.
- ²³ Savage, p. 49. Certainly, the author’s many assurances that he is not writing about his ‘dear sisters’ but for ‘other anchoresses’ when he warns of the temptations to which they are liable or the behaviours which he would discourage suggests that, indeed, his three ‘dear sisters’, the original addressees, were not his only (or indeed primary) audience.
- ²⁴ Savage, p. 46.
- ²⁵ The author describes this community as solitaries who nonetheless wish to live ‘as if’ they were in a convent, all ‘pulling in the same direction’, and living in individual cells which seem to have been within a day’s walk – they were able to share books through the mediation of their servants, suggesting that the servants could easily travel between their cells bearing books and news. As the community expanded even further, to the ‘twenty or more’ anchoresses mentioned in Corpus, word of their ‘convent’ spread to other areas of England, for which the original community became ‘like’ a mother-house (Corpus, f. 169r; see Millett, *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition*, pp. 96–7 and Savage and Watson, pp. 140–1).
- ²⁶ Savage, ‘The communal authorship of *Ancrene Wisse*’, p. 45.

- ²⁷ See Hazenfratz and Bella Millett, 'Ancrene Wisse and the Book of Hours', in *Writing Religious Women: Female Spiritual and Textual Practices in Late Medieval England*, ed. Denis Renevey and Christiania Whitehead (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), pp. 21–42.
- ²⁸ See Ann K. Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons in Medieval England* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985) and Millett, 'Ancrene Wisse and the Book of Hours'.
- ²⁹ As Warren has shown, entry into an anchorhold was (at least in theory) tightly regulated, requiring permission from a bishop, and evidence of both a strong vocation and financial support. Indeed, for many women, the time between their decision to enter the anchorhold and their actual enclosure extended over several years, while they settled their estates and financial affairs. Under such circumstances, there would have been plenty of time to consider their choice (and, presumably, to withdraw if doubts arose).
- ³⁰ E. J. Dobson, *The Origins of Ancrene Wisse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).
- ³¹ See *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwe*, B.M. Cotton MS Cleopatra C.VI, EETS os 267, ed. E. J. Dobson (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. xxv–xxvi. The connection between Matilda de Clare and the Cleopatra manuscript deserves further study, not only because it is one of the few indications of early ownership that survives, but also because Cleopatra is such an important manuscript in tracing the prehistory of the Corpus revision, containing as it does the notes of the original author.
- ³² For the history of the de Braose sisters, summarized below, see F. M. Powicke, 'Loretta Countess of Leicester', in *Historical Essays in Honour of James Tait*, ed. J. G. Edwards, V. H. Galbraith and E. F. Jacob (Manchester, 1993); Margaret Wade Labarge, 'Three medieval widows and a second career', in *Aging and the Aged in Medieval Europe*, ed. Michael M. Sheehan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), pp. 159–72; H. J. Nicholson, 'Margaret de Lacy and the Hospital of St. John at Aconbury, Herefordshire', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 50 (1999), 629–51; and Linda Deyner and Doug Thompson, 'The Barons de Braose', 20 October 2007 *The de Braose Website*, 8 January 2008 <<http://free-space.virgin.net/doug.thompson/BraoseWeb/stage.htm>>.
- ³³ Interestingly, the patterns of religious participation amongst the de Braose women seems to have followed matrilinear lines, as the daughters turned to their mother's family context for their reclusion and religious patronage: Flandrina entered Godstow, under the patronage of her mother's family; Margery's convent at Aconbury (near her own home at Ludlow) was founded in her mother's memory; and Annora was enclosed at Iffley, near Oxford (and Godstow). In light of William de Braose's abandonment of his family at the time of his exile, the death of his wife and eldest son, and the exile or imprisonment of his other children, the matrilinear bias of his daughters' religious patronage may be quite understandable.
- ³⁴ These connections would put Loretta in a similar intellectual milieu to the author of *Ancrene Wisse* and, indeed, we know that she later became an early patroness of the Franciscans in England, along with Simon Langton, archdeacon of Canterbury, and brother of Stephen Langton.

- ³⁵ Although there are no records which indicate why she might have chosen this location, her brother Giles's connections with Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury, and her own later connections with Simon Langton would suggest that their influence was of some importance.
- ³⁶ It is interesting to note that Iffley, where Annora was enclosed, is within walking distance of Godstow (albeit a long walk) and may thus have offered Annora the added attraction of offering a community of nuns that included her sister, close enough for contact, but far enough away to allow her a measure of independence. Similarly, for the three sisters to whom *Ancrone Wisse* was originally addressed, it seems that a patron and the availability of a cell close to their patron's hall had at least some part in their decision to seek the anchorhold rather than the nun's cell.
- ³⁷ There were no active confraternities of devout laypersons seeking to combine the active life of the world with a devout life of prayer (memorialized by Walter Hilton as a form of the 'mixed life'). The 'mixed life' which combined religious and secular worlds was the life of the active clergy – parish priests, bishops and clerics who served the laity in the world, rather than retiring to the monastery. There was no version of this mixed life for women. By the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, when widows like Joanna Newmarche, Joan Holand and others withdrew to religious seclusion, like numerous lay men and women they retreated to a community of professed religious, among whom they had the freedom to pursue the devout life without the necessity of rigorous religious vows. Here, they could end their lives in peace and contemplation, preparing their souls for the afterlife, now that their secular duties and obligations were discharged. See Mary C. Erler, 'Three fifteenth-century vowesses', in *Medieval London Widows, 1300–1500*, ed. M. Caroline Barron and Anne F. Sutton (Rio-Grande, OH: The Hambledon Press, 1994), pp. 165–84; 'English vowed women at the end of the Middle Ages', *Mediaeval Studies*, 57 (1995), 155–203; 'Exchange of books between nuns and laywomen: three surviving examples', in *New Science out of Old Books: Studies in Manuscripts and Early Printed Books in Honour of A. I. Doyle*, ed. Richard Beadle and A. J. Piper (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1995), pp. 360–73; *Women, Reading and Piety in Late Medieval England*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 46 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Carol M. Meale, "'oft siþis with grete deuoton I þought what I miȝt do pleyssyng to god": the early ownership and readership of Love's *Mirror*, with special reference to its female audience', in *Nicholas Love at Waseda: Proceedings of the International Conference 20–22 July, 1995*, ed. Shoichi Oguro et al. (London: D. S. Brewer, 1997), pp. 19–46.
- ³⁸ See Millett, 'Ancrone Wisse and the Book of Hours'. One must remember, as well, that some of the revisions in the Corpus version of *Ancrone Wisse* seem designed to soften the asceticism of the anchoritic life, making more allowance for comfort (although not luxury).
- ³⁹ There are several instances where the author of *Ancrone Wisse* implies that his readers might once have been in charge of an aristocratic household. For example, in Part 2, there is a long passage comparing the frivolous anchoress to the lady of a house (Millett, *Ancrone Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text*, pp. 42–3, ff. 28v–29r); and in Part 6 the author refers to the benefits his readers may derive from enduring the contempt those who in 'other circumstances' might have been

their servants (Millett, *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text*, pp. 135.133–6, f. 96v).

⁴⁰ See Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons in Medieval England*.

⁴¹ Continental examples include Hildegard of Bingen's writings for her nuns, and Heloise's demand that Abelard adapt the Benedictine Rule for her convent of the Paraclete.

⁴² The author of *Ancrene Wisse* tells us that his audience could read both English and (Anglo-Norman) French.

⁴³ Millett, 'Ancrene Wisse and the Book of Hours', pp. 21, 28 and 31.

⁴⁴ Although generated in the context of the anchorhold, these texts rapidly found their way into lay hands. Indeed, the manuscript in which the *Wohunge* survives may have been written for a lay audience.

⁴⁵ In at least two centres, the demand for vernacular devotional material was being met in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries: the nuns of Barking were producing Anglo-Norman texts designed for the literate religious woman, and in the West Midlands, the texts of the Katherine Group and, later, the Wooing Group were composed for an audience of literate laypersons and religious – including anchoresses.

⁴⁶ In spite of the fact that *Seinte Katerine* applauds the fact that Katherine did not read romance, but focused on devout and scholarly works, *Seinte Margarete* and *Seinte Iulienne* both employ the motifs and imagery of romance to great effect.

⁴⁷ Indeed, as Millett has shown, the programme of prayers and devotions set out in Part 1 of *Ancrene Wisse* parallels the later Books of Hours which became the 'breviaries of the laity' ('Ancrene Wisse and the Book of Hours', p. 32). However, as Millett points out, lay ownership of Books of Hours was rare in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (p. 25).

⁴⁸ *Euchan segge hir Ures as ha haueð iwriten ham* (Corpus 402, f. 6r, Millett, *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text*, p. 9). Millett points out that 'the word-order *haueð iwriten ham* (rather than *haueð ham iwriten*) shared by all the English MSS running, suggests that in this case the anchoresses did their own copying rather than having it done for them ('Ancrene Wisse and the Book of Hours', p. 36, n. 26).

⁴⁹ Corpus f. 11v, Millett, *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text*, p. 18. Millett has described the anchoresses' devotions in detail ('Ancrene Wisse and the Book of Hours', p. 26).

⁵⁰ Millett, 'Ancrene Wisse and the Book of Hours', p. 23: 'Each one should say what her heart most urges – versicles from the Psalter, readings from English or French, holy meditations, your kneelings.'

⁵¹ And, of course, the *imitatio Christi* modelled by the saints in their martyrdom could be sought by both religious and lay, in the ascetic life of the anchorhold or in sickness and tribulation.

⁵² The popularity (and wide circulation) of vernacular Passion narratives and meditations is generally attributed to the explosion of vernacular translations and adaptations of Franciscan devotional writings in the mid- to late fourteenth century, and, in particular, the works attributed to Bonaventure. Texts like the *Stimulus Amoris* provided guides to Passion meditation, but simpler meditations upon the

Passion itself also abounded. Chief amongst these is, of course, the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, the most well-known adaptation of which is Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*. There are, however, numerous shorter texts, such as Bonaventure's *Lignum Vitae* (which survives in both Anglo-Norman and Middle English translations adapted for lay readers), *The Privy of the Passion* and Rolle's *Meditations on the Passion*, which enabled less complex prayer and meditation, allowing the reader to place herself at the foot of the cross and experience the sufferings and death of Christ as a direct observer.

⁵³ The prayers and devotions in Part 1 of *Ancrene Wisse* are dominated by prayers to the Virgin Mary, particularly those in English (i.e. those that the anchoresses would have clearly understood); yet devotion to the Passion is so thoroughly fused with her daily prayers that the two are difficult to separate. The anchoress's day is punctuated by prayers recalling the Passion, and meditation on the Passion permeates *Ancrene Wisse* from the anchoress's meditation upon Christ's body in the eucharistic host, separated from her by 'only a wall', to her fleeing to the Cross for shelter or wielding it as a weapon against the Devil. However, there is no specific text or prayer to guide her through such meditation, as the *Wohunge* does.

⁵⁴ Savage and Watson, p. 246. Aelred's *Rule for a Recluse* (an important source for *Ancrene Wisse*) is, as Savage and Watson note, an 'outstanding example of this tradition' especially in the first section of the Threefold Meditation.

⁵⁵ The affective devotion of the *Wohunge* has much in common with the more restrained of the continental mystics, and further study may reveal some connections. For now, though, it is interesting that the region of the AB language has strong Flemish associations, which suggest that some connection with the Low Countries is not impossible.

⁵⁶ Similar meditation was also facilitated by images of the Passion, ranging from complex illuminations in Books of Hours to prayer scrolls and indulgences illustrated with the Instruments of the Passion (the *Arma Christi* texts and illuminations), to simple images such as the crucifix which an anchoress could view through the window of her cell, hanging over the altar of the church. It is possible that aristocratic widows who sought the refuge of the anchorhold may have brought such images with them. However, the vast majority of Passion meditations are not illustrated, and texts like the *Wohunge* offered textual guidance to the kind of meditation that was rooted in the contemplation of such visual images, and which the *Ancrene Wisse* author recommends to his readers. As Smith has argued, the 'devotionally literate' layperson of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries would be familiar enough with the iconographic representations found in their Books of Hours to interpret the complex associations and imagery found there. This is true largely because the medieval reader (lay or anchoritic) was surrounded by such images: on the walls and windows of churches, above the altars etc. See Kathryn A. Smith, *Art, Identity and Devotion in Fourteenth-Century England: Three Women and their Books of Hours* (London: The British Library and University of Toronto Press, 2003); for the concept of devotional literacy and the influence of the Franciscans on the imagery of the Passion, see also Vincent Gillespie, 'Strange images of death: the passion in later medieval English devotional and mystical writing', in *Zeit, Tod und Ewigkeit in der Renaissance*

Literatur, *Analecta Cartusiana*, 117 (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1987), pp. 113–59; and the historical introduction to Michael Sargent (ed.), *Nicholas Love: The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2005).

- ⁵⁷ All quotations from the *Wohunge* are from the edition and translation which I am currently preparing for Broadview Press.
- ⁵⁸ Such a close reading is needed not only of the meditation which it contains, but of the text upon which much of its imagery is based. Its survival in the Titus manuscript, along with *Ancrene Wisse*, suggests that at least some readers would have been intimately familiar with *Ancrene Wisse* itself, a familiarity based on long, thoughtful, and repetitive reading, which, as Savage and Watson suggest, a modern reader can never hope to imagine, let alone achieve (p. 32).
- ⁵⁹ As Savage and Watson put it, ‘where Bernard is always conscious that the idea of the soul’s marriage to Christ is a metaphor, the reader of *Wohunge* is encouraged to choose Christ as a lover in a literal, one might even say a physical, way, and to argue over his suitability as a husband as though this is exactly what he is, or is to become.’ Thus they conclude, ‘the work’s most important source is the nonliterary one of the anchoresses’ real situation, as they saw it: married to Christ and crucified with him by their enclosure, and needing only to ratify that marriage and transform that crucifixion by passionately assenting to both in their hearts’ (p. 246).

‘Pe blod þ[at] bohte’: The Wooing Group Christ as Pierced, Pricked, and Penetrated Body

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Recent scholarship has addressed Christ’s body as a site of multiple, gendered penetrations in medieval art and literature. As well, scholarship has focused on the increasing sense of blood piety found throughout the Middle Ages, especially in the later era. However, early representations of both the permeable Christ and devotion to the wounds and blood have, until now, been overshadowed. In particular, the Christ celebrated in early anchoritic literature, especially the Wooing Group and *Ancrene Wisse*, is an insistently wounded, bleeding spouse, even when he appears in glory. I suggest that the Wooing Group focuses on the wounded Christ for three foundational reasons – eternal salvation, carnal reparation, and bodily purification – and that each of these reasons is tied to a specifically anchoritic outlook on the Incarnated Christ. The first is overt: Christ shed blood for humanity in order to open the kingdom of heaven. The other reasons are less explicit, but just as important to the anchoritic vocation. As will be discussed later, the anchoress lived with a constant threat of rape and violation; through mimetic mapping, Christ’s wounded presence relieves her of some of that fear. Because the cell and body are merged in the anchoritic vocation, the anchoress’s body threatened the purity of the church, while Christ’s stainless, bleeding body neutralized potential harm. When the two merge, his body becomes a stand in for hers, able to withstand sin and temptation, and able to overcome pollution and corruption

through his saving blood, thus making the wounded, bleeding Christ a necessary part of the anchoritic vocation.

Early Blood Piety & the Wounded Christ

In her most recent book, Caroline Walker Bynum argues that blood piety was a central force in the Middle Ages. More specifically, ‘geographically ... blood devotion was especially (although not by any means exclusively) northern. Chronologically, ... it was characteristic of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries’.¹ Continuing her insistence upon the lateness of blood devotion, Bynum declares,

I shall argue in what follows that blood debates and blood piety summed up peculiarly fifteenth-century anxieties. For behind debates over pilgrimage, relics, eucharist, miracles, and veneration, as behind a piety to which streams or drops of blood were central, lay two closely connected issues: the issue of holy matter, and the issue of access to God or, to put it another way, of God’s absence and presence.²

Problematically in terms of Bynum’s hypothesis, however, the Wooing Group – a collection of thirteenth century texts – fits many of her defined parameters. In particular, the anchoritic lifestyle was bound up with all of the so-called fifteenth-century concerns outlined above.

Two concerns – holy matter and access to God – can be connected through the sacrament of the eucharist. Bynum amply demonstrates the increasing desire the laity had to receive the blood of Christ alongside the communion bread of his body. While this would become one of the central foci found within heretical movements such as the Hussites, the desire existed long before the rebellion. Similarly, there was an increasing desire among the laity for more frequent reception of the eucharist in whatever form. In this, anchoresses occupied a unique position. Living in cells attached to churches, they enjoyed the constant presence of Christ in the sacrament. Anchoresses were privy to frequent reception of the physical sacrament, as well as constant reception of ocular communion (witnessing the elevated host). The squint, the small aperture or window leading into the church from the anchorhold, was generally positioned so as to afford the cell’s occupant the opportunity to participate in mass through a view of the high altar, the tabernacle, and surrounding accoutrements and sacramentals. Besides being part of mass, these objects also assisted the anchorite with contemplation. Examining remains of cells reveals that

while the view of the altar itself may have been at least partially obstructed, the view of the tabernacle was often clear. Jesus was a constant physical and spiritual presence. Moreover, a great many of these cells were built in front of the rood screen, beyond the point allowed to be penetrated by the ordinary gaze. And while anchoresses did not literally receive Christ’s blood in communion, they actively performed meditations that recalled Christ’s bleeding body as a way of accessing the holy matter of the eucharist, ‘þe holi sacrement of his flech & of his blod þ[at] ðe preost sacreð’³ [by the holy sacrament of his flesh and of his blood that the priest consecrates]. Through the sacrament as well as through guided meditation on the passion, anchoresses moved toward a totalizing union with Christ, sealed with his blood.

If the Wooing Group is precocious in its insistence on the importance of blood and wounds, it is also forward thinking in its anticipation of the Charter of Christ tradition, especially in its insistence upon inscribing identity upon the body.⁴ Although the vast majority of singular manuscripts date between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, the tradition had existed since the early days of the Church, and was a popular allegorical representation of salvation. In seeking to explain Christ’s willingness to submit to the extreme pains of the crucifixion, theologians believed that presenting his torture as a dying bequest, a ‘will’ of sorts made the concept of bodily sacrifice more palatable. The charter was a document written in blood, sealed by Christ’s wounds, and ratified by the flow of more blood. Jill Averil Keen notes four main groups of these charters: those of enfeoffment; those of pardon; Sunday letters; Christ’s will. Keen goes on to call these various texts ‘documents of salvation’, because they are all legal interpretations of Christ’s salvific blood.⁵ The anchoritic charter is a combination of two of these groups. Charters of enfeoffment grant humans heavenly ‘land’ in exchange for ‘rent’ (love), while charters of pardon release humanity from the wages of sin in exchange for Christ’s blood sacrifice. The Wooing Group combines these approaches, further binding the relationship between Christ and anchoress in blood. In particular, all of the Wooing Group pieces focus on the idea of the anchoress being purchased by Christ through his blood and on the concepts of Christ’s blood being purifying.

This anchoritic enfeoffment in the Wooing Group, in turn, echoes the ‘heart-exchange’ motif, popular in late medieval mysticism.⁶ Instead of an actual heart, however, Christ’s blood is substituted:

þu swete iesu for me gef þesel-
uen . þat tin ahne heorte blod
ne cuðes tu wið halde. Derre

druri ne gef neauer na lefmon
to oðer.⁷

[but you, sweet Jesus, so gave of yourself for me that you knew not how to withhold your own heart's blood. A dearer love-token was never given, lover to lover.]

Heart's blood seals the love between anchoress and Christ. This is a marriage contract: in exchange for her whole self, the anchoress receives an enfeoffment: 'to rixlen o þi rihthond / crunet wið þeseluen'⁸ [to reign at your right hand, crowned with you.] That Christ has purchased the anchoress – as spouse – and saved her, raised her up through his blood, is clear. She points out later that this was an expensive purchase: 'A deore cheap hefdes tu on / me ne was neauer unwurþi / þing chepet swa deore'⁹ [Ah, you had a costly purchase in me; never was an unworthy thing purchased so dearly.] These lines are followed by an extended series of images of Christ's passion, all of which swirl with his blood, all of which was shed to save ('purchase') her. The lines are deliberately evocative, meant to vividly incorporate the anchoress into the scene, where she can literally become awash with Christ's blood, culminating in an actual heart exchange: 'Wið wrange schuldi / þe min heorte wearnen / siðen þat tu bohtes herte for herte'¹⁰ [Only unjustly could I deny you my heart, since you redeemed heart for heart.] The exchange of bloody hearts surpasses the exchange of rings in this marriage.

In the Wooing Group's version of the extended metaphor of body as deed, the anchoritic charter also demonstrates the cleansing ('pardoning') effect of Christ's blood. Each of the prayers refers to the healing property of the blood. For instance, the *Ureisun of God Almihti* notes, 'þe streames þet striden adun of þine deo / rewurðe uet . & of þine eadie honden . nes hit forto waschen sunifule soulen?'¹¹ [the streams that flow down from you ... Is it not for saving those soaked in sin?] The *Ureisun* carries this one step further, praising not only the cleansing power of Christ's blood, but also the healing power of Christ's wounds:

ase wis ase a drope of þine deorwurðe blode muhte
weaschen awei alle folkes fulðe ase wis liues
louerd þeo ilke fif wellen of þine blisfule bodie
sprungen & striken dun strundes of blode weasch
mine fif wittes of all blodie sunnen ...
... þine wunden helen þe
wunden of mine soule.¹²

[Just as certainly, a drop of thy precious blood might wash away all folks’ filth; just as certainly, life’s Lord, might the same five wells that sprang from thy blissful body and gushed down streams of blood wash my five senses of all their bloody sin ... May thy wounds heal the wounds of my soul.]

This ability of Christ’s blood to save and purify was a standard Christian belief. A century later, the *Fasciculus Morum*, a preacher’s manual, reports: ‘we should know that he shed his blood in the first place that it might be a help to sinners and a remedy against our spiritual enemies and fleshly sins’.¹³ The Wooing Group seems to have taken this salvific function seriously – each one of the prayers refers to the saving power of Christ’s holy blood. This blood springs forth not just from the side wound or the Eucharistic chalice; rather, Christ’s saving blood comes from his hands, feet, side, penis, fingernails, back, head, sweat, tear ducts, and the chalice. Christ’s blood is omnipresent in anchoritic prayers as his body is omnipresent in anchoritic cells.

Christ’s Body in the Cell

Anchoresses took three main vows: chastity, obedience, and ‘stude steaðeluestnesse,’ or stability of abode. Stability of abode, unique to the anchoritic vocation, assured that the anchoress would remain in one location – her cell – for the duration of her earthly existence. The inclusion of this unique vow indicates the centrality of the anchoritic space to the vocation as a whole. The anchoress was dependent upon her cell not only as a dwelling place, but also as a site of identification. The cell defined who she was – an anchoress – and metaphorically, she and the chamber became a single entity. An oft-quoted passage from *Ancrene Wisse*, a prominent thirteenth century guide for anchoresses, exemplifies this metaphor:¹⁴

þeos twa þing limpeð to ancre, nearowðe ant
bitternesse; for wombe is nearow wununge, þer ure Lauerd wes
reclus,
... 3ef 3e þenne i nearow stude þolieð bitternesse, 3e
beoð his feolahes, reclus as he wes i Marie wombe. Beo 3e ibunden
inwið fowr large wahes? Ant he in a nearow cader, i-neilet o rode, i
stanene þruh bicluset hete-feste. Marie wombe ant þis þruh weren his
ancre-huses.
... ‘3e’, þu ondswerest me, ‘ah he wende ut of ba.’ 3e; went tu
alswa of ba þine ancre-huses, as he dude, wiðute bruche, ant leaf ham

ba ihale. þet schal beon hwen þe gast went ut on ende, wiðuten
bruche ant wem of his twa huses. þet an is þe licome. þet other is þe
uttre hus, þet is as þe uttre wah abute þe castel.¹⁵

[These two things belong to the anchoress: narrowness and bitterness. For the womb is a narrow dwelling, where our Lord was a recluse ... If you then suffer bitterness in a narrow place, you are his fellows, recluse as he was in Mary's womb. Are you imprisoned within four wide walls? – And he in a narrow cradle, nailed on the cross, enclosed tight in a stone tomb. Mary's womb and his tomb were his anchorhouses ... 'Yes,' you answer me, 'But he went out of both.' Yes, and you too will go out of both your anchorhouses as he did, without a break, and leave them both whole. That will be when the spirit goes out in the end, without break or blemish, from its two houses. One of them is the body, the other is the outer house, which is like the outer wall around a castle.¹⁶]

The physical structure of the anchorhold becomes, in essence, the physical structure of the anchoress' body. It is crucial to the vocation that the anchoress' cell remains inviolate. She should not admit visitors, particularly male ones, nor should she indiscriminately open her windows.

The image of Christ's body dominates the space within this cell, and thus takes hold of the anchoress' body as well. Christ is present on several levels: physically, metaphorically, performatively, and spiritually. The crucifix is the main vehicle for Christ's physical presence. A number of anchoritic Rules, including *Ancrene Wisse* and Aelred's *Rule for a Recluse*, required that a crucifix be part of the cell's meagre furnishings. Additional crosses were common as well. Each of these provided tangible reminders of Christ's sacrifice and filled the cell with his existence. The metaphorical level of Christ's presence combines physical reality with spiritual function. To enhance the physical presence of Christ gained through the crucifix, the cell's windows, squint(s), and location all recalled the close relationship shared by the anchoress and her heavenly spouse. By being attached to the church itself, the anchoress was metaphorically attached to Christ, as his presence infused the sacred space. Further, medieval churches commonly had aisles and transepts that reflected the shape of the cross; thus, anything that was part of the church became a physical attachment of that metaphorically invoked cross. Every cell also had at least one squint that allowed the occupant to observe mass and receive communion. The view from this squint was generally one of the high altar, or in a few instances, a side altar. The altar where the sacrifice of the mass took place thus became the central focus point of the anchoritic gaze, providing another visual reminder of Christ's presence, love, commitment, and sacrifice. Frequently, the cells that housed female anchorites had cruciform squints instead of angular or

square ones. Not only did this purify her gaze, but also it regulated her perception of the external world – everything was viewed through Christ and his body.¹⁷ Finally, the external windows, used for conversing, gift reception, and other physical needs, also bore reminders of Christ’s sacrificial love, as these windows were covered with black drapes into which white crosses were sewed. The black drapes recall the tomb in which the anchoress was said to dwell, as well as Christ’s sepulchre, while the white crosses provided visual reminders of Christ’s redemptive suffering.

As an object of devotion and fantasy, the body of Christ assumes a central place in the anchoress’ cell. Particularly, it serves to remind the anchoress of her commitment to her heavenly spouse, but also serves as a proper outlet for her redirected desires. Anchoritic devotions are designed to help anchoresses avoid moments of temptation, and to focus instead on turning their gaze towards an image of perfection (Christ). Significantly, the anchoritic gaze is even more specifically directed towards a suffering Christ. In a passage that foreshadows the *blazon* technique, *The Lofsong of Our Lefdi* relates the details of Christ’s fragmented body. Under the heated gaze of the anchoress, who has just admitted ‘mis i looked’, [evilly, I looked; l. 24], Christ’s shattered body and emotions are displayed:

bi his eadi festunge iþe wildernesse bi þe herde hurtes & þe unwurðe woves ðet
he for us sunfule willeliche þolede bi his deað-fule grure & bi his blodie swote bi
his eadi beoden in hulles him one bi his nimunge & bindunge bi his ledunge forð
bi al þat me him demde bi his cloðes wrixlunge Nu red nu hwit him on
hokerunge bi his scornunge & bi his spotlunge & bufettunge & his hel<i>unge bi
þe þorne<ne> crununge bi ðe kinezerde of rode him of scornunge bi his owune
rode on his softe schuldres so herde druggunge bi þe dulte neiles bi þe sore wun-
den bi þe holi rode bihis side openunge bi his blodi Rune þet ron inne monie
studen In umbe keoruunge in his blod spe tunge in his pine þornene crununge
erest in his one hond & seoððen in his oðer olast in his side þurlunge wið ute so
re wunde 3et ase halewen weneð þet toðe blodrune was in his erest<e> nimunge
in þe feste bindunge þet tet blod wrong ut et his eadie neiles.¹⁸

[by his blessed fasting in the wilderness – by the hard hurts and the unworthy miseries that he willingly endured for us sinful [people] – by his deadly terror and by his bloody sweat – by his blessed prayers alone in the hills – by his capture and binding – by his being led forth – by all that anyone condemned him [with] – by his clothes-changing ... now red, now white, in mockery of him – by his scorning and by his spitting and buffeting and his blindfolding – by the crowning with thorns – by the royal scepter of reed, in mockery of him – by his own cross, on his soft shoulders, so cruelly dragging – by the blunt nails – by the sore wounds – by the holy cross – by his side-opening – by his bloody Stream

that ran in many places: in [his] circumcision; in his bloody sweating; in his painful crowning with thorns; first in his one hand and afterwards in his other; lastly in his side-piercing – except for the sore wound, as believed by saints, that true stream of blood – it was in his first capture, in the binding fast, that that blood pressed out at his blessed nails.]

In this rather long passage, it becomes clear that the representation of Christ's body revolves around blood. At times, the objects of his torture are substituted for pieces of his body or actions committed upon it. For instance, the anchoress turns from the crowning with thorns, an action that inscribes the marks of the torturers upon Christ's flesh, to the sceptre, cross, and nails used to imprint his identity as suffering sacrifice on the world. Central to this passage is the concept of display and its counterpart, spectatorship:

Description, then, is a gesture of display, a separating off and a signalling of particulars destined to make visible that which is described. Its object or matter is thus submitted to a double power-relation inherent in the gesture itself: on the one hand, the describer controls, possesses, and uses that matter to his own ends; and, on the other, his reader/listener is extended the privilege or pleasure of 'seeing'.¹⁹

In this idea of double power, the describer possesses and the reader 'sees'. In the anchorhold, however, the anchoress is both describer and reader, so she possesses what she sees, and she becomes what she performs. In the space of the cell, anchoress and Christ fuse into one being – what happens to him happens to her, and, presumably, vice versa. The discourse of the anchoritic vocation allows for the positing of a new space where the particularly anchoritic Christ can exist, and can overlap with the anchoress herself.

Merging with the Wounded Christ

Besides the obvious salvific function of Christ's blood – and thus the necessity of having him be pierced and pricked – there are at least two additional reasons that the anchoritic Christ was necessarily wounded, the potential for rape, and the purification of menstrual blood. Both of these reasons are tied to and negotiated through sexuality. Anchoritism, like mysticism and asceticism, holds as one of its goals union with the divine. The ascetic tradition sought to achieve perfection initially through bodily denial, and eventually through bodily punishment. The practitioner's ultimate desire –

spiritual perfection – was obtained through the denial of the body and of the outside world; thus, holy men and women who aspired to ecstatic union with God deliberately sought out human suffering in order to fulfil their true desire. Instead of focusing on denial and repression, mysticism focused on desire, employing sexual intercourse with the Incarnated (and thus suffering) Christ as a primary metaphor for divine union. Both vocations, however, relied upon suffering as a vehicle for this expression. Anchoritism bridged the gap between these, with enclosure and discipline providing the ascetic atmosphere, and the performative prayers and Rules indicating mysticism. The anchoress was a bride of Christ, and as such was entitled to all rights and privileges thereof, including consummation. This could most easily occur within Christ’s wounds:

As the place of mystical communication and knowledge, the wound of Christ offers the mystic access to mystical union. Yet the ‘metaphor’ for communication is threatened by erotic ‘materializing’ of the mystic experience ... As a place of mystical union and knowledge, the wound of Christ is sexualized even when the Latin homology is not present ... The coming to know Christ, which *imitatio* strives after, is an erotic act. Language, like imitation, travels across the integrity of the physical and spiritual realms of knowledge and signification.²⁰

Medieval Christianity endowed pain with great spiritual significance and recognized a supernatural use for suffering. In general, English anchoresses were enjoined not to undertake strict ascetic practices, so without elaborate self-mortification strategies, the anchoress’ participation in Christ’s passion became strictly mystical. Since the physical interior space of her cell was not a space of purgation, the interior space of her soul became the available and appropriate space. In her solitary cell, the anchoress was compelled to consider the body of Christ, both as saving force and as pleasurable object. And when the anchoress spent hours contemplating Jesus’ beautiful form, and recreating the tortures of the cross, he entered her heart, mind, and soul through the flowing blood. In this way, mortification became the focal point for imagination and meditation.

Anchoresses exploited their shared ‘physical’ pain – sensory in nature – as a mechanism for identifying with the suffering saviour. Like the early Christian martyrs, whose sense of self was systematically destroyed through torture only to be reconstructed through their reidentification with Christ, the anchoresses meticulously dismantled their worldly lives and their worldly selves only to be reconstructed through their new relationship with Christ. According to Michael A. Sells, mystics, ‘claim a moment of “realization” – a moment in which ... sense and reference are fused into

identity with event'.²¹ Mystical union and divine transcendence take place within and through the sensations of the body; with the suffering body serving as a staging area for identity formation.

In the anchoritic world, physical space and spiritual space struggle to remain separate, yet constantly overlap. Henri Lefebvre elaborates on the idea of space as a code: 'a spatial code is not simply a means of reading or interpreting space; rather it is a means of living in that space: of understanding it and of producing it'.²² In anchoritic reality, space, place, and occupant become almost interchangeable, a situation not uncommon for medieval women in general. In the Middle Ages, women were generally tied to a given interior space – the cloister, the cell, the home, or even the brothel. These spatial limits made it both easy to control women and easy to identify the margins. In the anchoritic life, spatial identification was built into the lifestyle:

Nan ancre bi mi read, ne schal makien professiun – þet is,
bihten ase heast – bute þreo þinges: þet beoð obedience, chastete,
ant stude steaðeluestnesse, (þet ha ne schal þet stude neaver mare
changin bute for nede ane, as strengðe ant deaðes dred, obedience
of hire bischop oðer of his herre).²³

[By my counsel, no anchoress shall make profession, that is promise as a vow, except in three matters: these are obedience, chastity and stability of abode, so that she will never change that abode again except only in the case of need, such as force and fear of death, obedience to her bishop or to his superiors.²⁴]

These lines, taken from the opening of *Ancrene Wisse*, reify the link between the anchoritic lifestyle and topography. *Ancrene Wisse* further reminds the anchoress, rather brutally, that the anchorhold is her grave – her body is so intertwined with her cell, that she will not be separated from it, even in death. This reminds anchoresses to focus on the afterlife, but also it further emphasizes the extreme seclusion and restricted space of the anchoritic life. The physical anchorhold is an extension of her body – and serves as her tomb. A similar notion is found within the Celtic tradition, where both concepts are adroitly connected:

I am hidden and buried in this hollow heap of stones
Beneath the towering rock for a monument and a *sanctified abode*
An undefiled sanctuary, a house without stain
... this tomb.²⁵ (my emphasis)

As this statement shows, the anchoritic enclosure was clearly a tomb, but was also a pure dwelling place. Likely this tradition can trace its roots back

to the early Desert tradition, when Coptic fathers urged monks to pledge their bodies to the walls of their cells, fusing flesh and stone.²⁶ Thus, the dynamics of space permeated every aspect of an anchoress’ life. In the spiritual sense, the anchoress did not exist *in* a place; rather, she *was* the space. In becoming an anchoress, she turned away from the physical world in order to seek an inner one, like the Sacred Heart or the Wounds of Christ.

The anchoresses’ body is integrated with her cell – a combination of physical spaces – as her mind and soul are integrated with Christ. As Roberta Gilchrist points out, ‘space and behaviour are mutually dependent’.²⁷ The conflation of the mystical body with the physical one creates this new identity:

... Mi bodi henge
wið þi bodi neiled o rode sperred
querfaste wiðinne fowr
wahes & henge i wile wið þe
& neauer mare of mi rode cume
til þat i deie...
A iesu swa swet hit is wið þe
to henge.²⁸

[May my body hang with your body nailed upon the cross, enclosed transversely within four walls! And I will hang with you, nevermore to come off my cross until I die ... Ah, Jesus, so sweet it is to hang with you!]

Combining ideas of spectatorship, imitation and reidentification allows for the overlap of anchoress and Christ. Moreover, anchoritic prayers such as those in the Wooing Group demand performance. The anchoress reads the same prayers daily, and in doing so engages in the performance of her vocation. Part of this involves merging with her beloved – her body ‘hangs’ with Christ’s, and the cross, a site of suffering, becomes their marriage bed. Union takes place through pain; ‘in the privacy of her cell, though, she has the opportunity to translate that suffering into a different locus, to identify it as Christ’s suffering’.²⁹ Alongside this mimetic suffering, the anchoress must visualize Christ’s body, which subsequently becomes an object of devotion and fetish, and eventually serves as a proxy for her. As the anchoress performs Christ’s suffering, she imaginatively identifies with his position, gaining access to his body through the guiding visual imagery of his wounds. They are necessary signifiers, which enable the sight of passion, and thus allow merger with Christ. The anchoress’s ‘filthy flesh’ needs to be unmade and remade, and Christ’s body, and his erotic suffering, is the site of this struggle. Though she has sinned, his body will bear the punish-

ment; the point of convergence between the two bodies is Christ's flowing blood.

The wounds of Christ provide a space – physical, spiritual, and metaphorical – in which this transformative process can occur. As Bynum points out, 'the wound or wounds of Christ are more frequently hymned as doorway and access, refuge and consolation, than as violation; to penetrate is to open the way'.³⁰ In particular, the wound in Christ's side 'provided a safe haven in which to live wounded inside the wounded body of God'.³¹ Moreover, 'devotion to the Wounded Side ... was widespread throughout medieval Europe before it was eventually superseded, in the thirteenth century, by the worship of the Sacred Heart'.³² The heart provides love, safety, comfort, nourishment, and enclosure – all hallmarks of the anchoritic life as Christ's spouse. Kristen McQuinn further points out that 'this type of devotion placed much emphasis on nuptial and Passion contemplation', both central to the Wooing Group.³³ For instance, in the *Wooing of Our Lord*, the anchoress triumphantly declares:

... Broht
 tu haues me fra þe world to bur
 of þi burðe steked me i chaumbre
 I mai þer þe swa swetli kissen
 & cluppen & of þi luue haue gastli
 likinge A swete iesu mi liues
 luue wið þi blod þu haues me
 boht³⁴

[You have brought me from the world to the bower of your birth, and bound me fast in your chamber. There, I may so sweetly kiss you and embrace you, and in your love find spiritual delight. Ah, sweet Jesus, my life's love, with your blood you have bought me.]

The Wooing makes clear that his wounds reveal the depth of Christ's love. The side wound provides a particularly powerful locus for the merger of Christ and anchoress, as within it,

... many of mysticism's predominant themes converge. The wound in Christ's side is a refuge; a nuptial bedchamber; a womb from which one is reborn into eternal life; a breast that nourishes, infuses the soul with grace, and provides erotic pleasure; a pair of lips that kisses; a flower; a warehouse that stores mystical paraphernalia ... a well of living waters; a showering fountain of blood that washes away sin; an attribute of the New Adam; and a symbol of Christ's final contribution to a vicarious sacrifice by quotas.³⁵

In Christ’s case, the infliction of wounds equals, or at least parallels, the inscription of his identity in the text. The anchoritic prayers’ literary re-enactment serves to underscore the immediate and constantly reoccurring nature of Christ’s passion in the world of each reader of the text, thereby incorporating the reader/spectator into the scene. His body legally, spiritually, and metaphorically stands in for the anchoress’s, – a viable alternative since Christ’s body is both male and female, both sexual and virginal, and both open and closed. In illustrating this exchange, the iconographical focus of medieval art on the mouth, blood, and wounds of Christ reveals ‘an eroticised, gender-bending and penetratable body open to flows and fluid desires, that signalled danger in other lesser bodies’.³⁶ According to Irigaray, Christ’s body as a symbol has openings, like a woman’s, for a purpose. By mapping ‘female lack’ back onto the masculine body, Christ’s literal body, female lack is reclaimed. Within the attempts to close this fissured space, God and woman might meet.³⁷ In him, the conflation of humanity and divinity is enacted without danger to his purity; therefore it is ‘safe’ for him to assume the place of the sinner, in this case, the anchoress. Impurities of the soul, such as sexual desire, could be funnelled through a carefully controlled, ritualized narrative. Similarly, impurities of the body, such as rape and menstruation, could be channelled through the carefully constructed image of Christ. Further, all of these Christological functions are accomplished through a bleeding, wounded Christ – one whose body coexists physically and symbolically, and one that merges with the anchoress.

In this regard – Christ acting as the anchoress’ proxy after she has imaginatively identified with him – the anchoritic experience becomes one of interpassivity. This concept is based on the work of Slavoj Žižek, and elaborated by Emma Campbell, both of whom rely upon the Lacanian concept of the de-centred subject.³⁸ In essence, Žižek purports that because of the subject’s indirect agency, ‘*both* active and passive responses ... can be accomplished through another’.³⁹ Active responses can be categorized two groups – the Other performs a task on the subject’s behalf, but she/he does not recognize their own belief, or the Other performs a task on your behalf, but the subject believes she/he accomplished it alone. Similarly, the subject can be passive through the Other – this is what Žižek specifically calls ‘interpassivity’. In displacing the subject from the centre of passivity, however, the Other also replaces the subject with the passive object. As Campbell explains interpassivity: ‘[it] prevent[s] the subject from experiencing this transgressive pleasure [*jouissance*, or the “pleasure principle”] directly, enabling her to displace it onto the Other who experiences it in her

stead'.⁴⁰ The boundaries between subject and object become blurred, and both positions may be occupied simultaneously. The anchoress' transformative identification with Christ results in a totalizing union achieved through blood and wounds.

The intertwined concepts of the charter of Christ – redemption and purification – also reverberate throughout these two more specific ways in which the anchoress' transformative identification with Christ plays out. In providing a doppelganger, Christ purchases and protects the anchoress' virginity, and also prevents and/or cleanses possible pollution. Each of these is, in turn, a salvific function of Christ's blood, and one directly necessary to the anchoritic vocation.

Public bleeding, hagiographic union and physical rape

In *The Curse of Eve, The Wound of the Hero*, Peggy McCracken identifies a 'broader system of cultural values in which men's blood is celebrated in public displays but women's blood [is] characterized as dangerous, as polluting, and as a bleeding that should not be seen'.⁴¹ Building her case, at least initially, upon the distinction between the blood of circumcision and menstrual blood, McCracken clearly identifies an essential dichotomy: 'men's blood is salvific, women's blood is polluting'.⁴² This position aligns neatly with the theological implications of Christ's saving blood. However, it also supports the additional reasons that representations of a wounded Christ are so important within the anchorhold. The first of these to examine is the threat of sexual violence, particularly rape. This act was an especially troubled one in the Middle Ages, problematized by the conflicts between secular and canon law as well as by varying medical and social perceptions. Unlike modern definitions of the term, which rely primarily on constructions of power, medieval 'rape', at least early on, carried the explicit sense of sexual violation. There was a particularly high price to pay for the violation of a nun:

If anyone in lewd fashion seizes a nun either by her clothes or her breast without her leave, the compensation is to be double that we have established for a lay person.⁴³

Various other penitentials equate raping a nun with raping a widow or a married lady, and several with raping an unmarried woman. In no case does it go lightly punished.⁴⁴ There is a further implication in the rather elaborate codes of early England that violation of nuns was considered especially

enjoyable. This sense of defilement is celebrated within the virgin martyr hagiographies as well as later secular romances, in which the ‘saintly’ woman is the repeated focus of sexual force.

Rape and other violations occurred with alarming frequency in medieval society, and the extreme isolation of the anchoress, especially as compared to other women, would have left her vulnerable to attack. However, this same isolation also left her vulnerable to temptation. As women who lived completely enclosed lives, anchoresses were both the safest of all women, and the most dangerous. Enclosure, at first looked upon suspiciously by the monastic world, became the preferred method of regulating female behaviour, and, indeed, became one of the identifying characteristics of female religious life. This was predicated upon a two-fold belief – the women were being protected from the world, but, simultaneously, the world (men) was being protected from the dangerous influence of female sexuality. Architecturally, spiritually, and vocationally, anchoresses were safer because of – and in spite of – their extreme enclosure. Because of these unique conditions, anchoresses were encouraged to adopt a routine within their cells that allowed them to redirect their tempting thoughts towards their heavenly spouse. This channelling was promoted through ritual and performance (the Wooing Group), visual enhancement (cruciform squints, the crucifix in the cell), and through edifying reading (hagiographies). Indeed, many of these methodologies inherently touched upon the threat of violation possible within the outside world, a threat dramatically realized in most virgin martyr hagiographies.

Texts anchoresses were encouraged to read included a number of edifying hagiographies, such as those in the Katherine Group (*St. Katherine*, *St. Margaret*, *St. Juliana*). These narratives were intended to increase the anchoress’ resolve to remain pure, they also provided a source of fantasy. Katherine Gravdal, for instance, suggests that male audiences were titillated by the sustained threat of rape present in many virgin martyr narratives.⁴⁵ This interest recalls the inexorable draw of the cloistered nun to would-be rapists. The heightened sense of unavailability and the increased sanctity of the woman proportionately intensified the man’s desire to possess her sexually. Once defiled, she would not only lose her honour, dignity, and virginity, she would also, quite possibly, lose her soul. Church law was torn on the issue of rape, especially the rape of virgins. Officially, if she resists the invasive actions and does not consent to sexual intercourse, no repercussions were assigned; however, given the nature of women as carnal beings, most theologians were doubtful that once begun, the act remained without pleasure for women. It was doubtful that any victim of rape was completely unwilling, and thus blameless.

As Saunders points out, 'hagiography, more than any other genre, engages with the question of the sanctity of the raped virgin'.⁴⁶ The narratives about the early Christian martyrs reflect an obsessive concern with the preservation of virginity as a path to sainthood. Thus, virginity was the nexus of the woman's holiness, and the source of her spiritual power. The relationship is fairly straightforward: the woman gains power by converting to (or upholding) Christianity and by controlling her bodily desires and retaining her virginity; this power threatens the pagan ruler(s) who then seek to eliminate her power, first through conversion (sacrifice to heathen gods), but also through marriage or concubinage – in other words, sex. Simon Gaunt declares the 'universal subtext of saints' lives about women is forced sex'.⁴⁷ To render the virgin martyr powerless, she must not only turn away from the Christian God, but also turn towards the pagan man and his fleshly desires. The constant threat of sexual violation fills the text with sexual tension alongside spiritual tension. Numerous critics have spoken about the eroticism captured within virgin martyr hagiographies, wherein scantily clad, beautiful young women are stripped and beaten in front of a hungry, hostile crowd. Soft, white, nubile bodies are put on display and then battered, bruised, and left bleeding.

Saunders rightly points out that many studies of sex and violence in hagiography overlook a crucial point: 'the depiction of the saint's tortured body must have evoked very vividly the familiar image of the naked, mutilated body of Christ ... the naked body in pain becomes an object of inspiration, even desire, but often in such a way as to recall the violence of Christ's own death'.⁴⁸ The threat of rape is replaced with the reality of death, just as the threat of human sexuality is replaced with the reality of Christ's presence. Just as his presence refocuses her sexual temptation, his presence also redirects any sexual violation. Indeed, as Cynthia Hahn points out, 'virgin martyrs represent what might be called "doubled bodies"'.⁴⁹ She is both sexually menacing – as all women were – and sexually safe, having moved 'miraculously' beyond sexuality. This miraculous achievement came through the martyrs' deliberate attempts at *imitatio Christi*. The martyrs were desirable women who controlled their desires in order to achieve perfect union with Christ. They resisted attempts at persuasion and violation, even through horrendous tortures. In some cases, this staunch refusal to give into temptation was rewarded by substitution – instead of suffering the tortures herself, God sent an angel to take her place, or, in other case, Christ swapped places with the martyr in order that she might escape the pain and suffering, though never the final consummation (death).

These virgin martyrs, with whom Christ switched places and protected from rape and violation, were the anchoress’ role models. She, too, lived with the fear of rape every day, as she is reminded by texts like *Ancrene Wisse*. She was told not to allow men to look at her, not only because a glimpse of her would incite desire (hers and his), but also because men might make a forcible attempt to possess her. She was instructed to never be alone, particularly in the case of a ‘broken-open house’: ‘If some great necessity breaks your house open, while it stays broken, have a woman of pure life to stay with you in it by day and night.’⁵⁰ All of these measures were taken in order to guard her chastity (not necessarily virginity) and her reputation, both of which were subject to violation. The creation of a homosocial environment furthered this sense of security. But even beyond the fear of physical rape was the underlying concern with violation. *Ancrene Wisse* spends a great deal of time discussing the various ways an ‘unbreachable’ anchoress can be ‘breached’. Christ’s physical presence, invoked through performative prayers, mitigated this threat to some degree.

Thus, the anchoress needed to envision a wounded, bleeding Christ – a Christ that could be violated in her place. Since this Christ is beautiful, he is worthy of being a spectacle. There are hints of his soft shoulder, gentle hands, and beautiful face, each of which is immediately coupled with pain. The soft shoulder is torn, the gentle hands are pierced, and the beautiful face is blood streaked. The male body is on display as a fragmented work of art. In this, Christ is the opposite of the tortured virgin martyrs whose bodies defied division. His (male) body is ripped apart and displayed to the common gaze, while the female body remains whole and ‘unbreached’, unpenetrated, and hidden from all but a select gaze. Even dramatic ascetic practices, described by Bynum, such as rolling in nettles, hanging from a gibbet, lying unclothed on a stone floor, or drinking pus, do not shatter the wholeness that must exist in order for a woman to experience the highest form of holiness.⁵¹ The anchoress was expected to remain intact in solitary splendour while imagining the brutality of being sundered. She obediently begs Christ to ‘heal me’, as her body should not sport any openings, unlike Christ’s body, who had to be opened in order to close hers:

clense & peasch
mine sunfule soule þuruh þine fif
wunden iopened o rode . wið neiles uor driuene
& seoruh fullliche fordutte . hel me uor-wunded
þuruh mine fif wittes wið deadliche sunnen . & opene
ham heouenli<che> king to<u>ward he<o>uenliche þinges.⁵²

[cleanse and purge my sinful soul. Through your five wounds, opened on the cross – pierced through with nails – and sorrowfully entirely filled up, heal me, who is seriously wounded through my five senses with deadly sins, and open them, Heavenly King, towards heavenly things.]

Christ's flesh substitutes for the anchoresses'. To keep her body from being penetrated, Christ must allow his body to be pierced instead. In an extended sexual metaphor, the senses are enticed, causing Christ, as 'stand-in', to be penetrated, 'driven through' by nails. These nails penetrate Christ's body, creating vaginal shaped wounds, which are then 'filled up' as the nails are sheathed in Christ's flesh. The anchoress cannot allow her body to be penetrated by anything – a gaze, a nail, or a penis. Once opened, her body is prey to sin and can no longer be considered holy. A multivalent, permeable site, Christ's body is able to be both sacred and profane in a way the anchoress could never be. Christ's body – without sin or blemish – is the ideal alternate.

While it may seem inappropriate to term Christ's crucifixion as a 'rape', the language belies that unseemly fit. Christ is represented as a static, pierced object of desire, and described in similar language as rape victims, such this case:

And in the midst of the room, the same R[aymond] ... took this same Joan ... between his two arms and ... laid her on the ground with her belly upwards and her back on the ground, and with his right hand raised the clothes of this same Joan ... with both his hands separated the legs and thighs of this same Joan, and with his right hand took his male organ of such and such a length and size and put it in the secret parts of this same Joan, and bruised her watershed and laid her open so that she was bleeding, and ravished her maidenhead.⁵³

Joan, the victim, was only eleven years of age, and was certainly an innocent. This graphic scene is recorded in the language of a homicide case, citing location, the nature of the attack, the weapon (penis), and the injury (rent maidenhood).⁵⁴

The crucifixion scenes in the Wooing Group and its associated texts echo this formulaic expression of felony rape. For instance, in the Wooing itself, the speaker (presumably the anchoress) witnesses a similar scene:

A nu haue þai broht him þider ... A nu naces mon mi lef. A nu driuen ha him up wið swepes & wið schurges. A hu liue i for reowðe þat seo mi mi lef mon up o rode & swa to drahen hise limes þat i mai in his bodi euch ban tellen. A hu þat ha nu driuen imene neiles þurh þine feire hondes in to hard rode þurh þine freoliche fet. A nu of þa honden & of þa fet swa luueli streames te blod swa rewli.⁵⁵

[Ah, now have they brought him thither ... Ah, now a man denudes my dear. Ah, now they drive him up with whips and with scourges. Ah, how can I live, on account of all the dole that I behold – my beloved up on the rood, his limbs so drawn that I may reckon each bone in his body! Ah, how they now drive iron nails through your fair hands into the hard cross, through your splendid feet. Ah, now from those hands and from your feet so lovely, streams the blood so piteously.]

Like the innocent Joan, Christ is lain down in the midst of the crowd on Calvary; he is stripped; his body is stretched out on the cross; he is penetrated, swiftly and painfully, by nails held against his limbs, and the result is wounds that are opened and bleeding. Instead of a rape being described as a homicide, this is a homicide described as a rape. The *Lofsong of ure Louerde* uses similar imagery: ‘þuruh þine fif wunden iopened o rode wið neiles uor driuene & seoruh fulliche fordutte hel me uor-wunded’.⁵⁶ Here, Christ’s wounds are driven through roughly and then sorrowfully, painfully filled up. In *A Talkyng of the Loue of God*, which is derived from the *Wooing* among other texts, the piercing of the holy body is described in anguished detail, and framed in familiar terms:

A Ihesu now þei driuen. þe blunte vnruide nayles þorw þi feire hondes.and þi frely feet.

Nou bersteþ þi skin ... þe blood of þi woundes.springes so breme.and stremeþ on þi white skin.⁵⁷

[Now they drive the blunt, enormous nails through your fair hands, and through your lovely feet. Now your skin bursts ... the blood of your wounds springs so brightly, and streams down your white skin.]

The penis imagery becomes apparent: the nails are ‘blunt’ and ‘large’, designed to push through the fair skin in body parts (feet, hands) that had earlier been described in erotically-charged language. As if losing his maidenhead, Christ’s body ‘bursts’ when entered, bringing forth a gush of blood that mars his white (womanly) skin. This is particularly reminiscent of Joan’s case, cited above, where her ‘watershed’ is bruised to bleeding, and her maidenhead is battered. In a conscious echo of sexual relations, the thrusting nails both open and close the body; Christ is both penetrated and filled.

Blood as Cleansing Sacred Space

Because most cells were attached to churches, the anchoress dwelled entirely within sacred space; indeed, her body and cell were one, making *her* sacred space; therefore, the anchoress's presence brought with it the fear of menstrual pollution. Rieder reports, 'medieval clerics believed that any blood, men's or women's, spilt in a church or on sacred ground caused pollution'.⁵⁸ Thus, Christ's position as metaphorical stand-in for the anchoress – when his body and blood become her body and blood – mitigates more than the inherent threat to her chastity; it also serves to alleviate the potential threat to the sacred space that is her body, the cell and the church. If the blood could not be avoided, it had to be purified. Rules such as *Ancrene Wisse* acknowledged these 'facts of life', by including provisions not only for acquisition of food and other necessities, alongside disposal of waste, but also by providing for procedures such as bloodletting. Bloodletting was undertaken for health reasons, as a preventative measure. Particularly for women, however, bloodletting was seen as a way to rid the body of excess blood – menstrual blood – that built up due to lack of orgasm.⁵⁹ Though recent scholarship reveals a conflicted tradition, there is at least some evidence that menstrual blood was considered a polluting force by some theologians and laypeople alike. As an anchoress, attached to the church, her body becomes the anchorhold, and, in turn, part of the church. Menstrual blood, therefore, presented at least some danger to the purity of sacred space.⁶⁰ In order to mitigate this pollution, anchoritic Rules suggested physical purging as one option.

Another way to mitigate pollution is suggested by anchoritic prayer, which redefined the anchoress's blood from defiling to purifying through a rhetorical (re)alignment with Christ's blood. Paula Rieder states, 'medieval clerical authors saw Christ's blood, shed at his circumcision and during his passion, as salvific whereas they saw menstrual and postpartal blood as polluting'.⁶¹ Transformative identification with Christ's body could thus be extended to his blood; thus, his pure blood substituted for her polluted fluid. The *Myroure of Recluses*, a fifteenth-century Middle English translation of the *Speculum Inclusorum*, outlines this 'blood swap' most clearly. First, the sinner/recluse and Christ undergo a sensory exchange: his lips absorb the sinner's bitter gall, his nose the sinner's uncleanness, and so forth. Next, seven manners in which Christ's blood saves the sinner are outlined. The first focuses on the 'stremes and ryueres' from Christ's head, which draw out the sinner's sin. The second holds up the 'clene blood of Cristes herte, cruely woundyd with a spere', which will cleanse and purge

the sinner’s sin. The third step notes the ‘cours of blood’ from Christ’s hands, which will wash away the sinner’s sins. The fourth manner examines the ‘flowynge blood passynge out’ in strong streams, which will also cleanse the sinner. The fifth approach specifies the ‘dropes’ of blood that will cleanse the sinner from ‘superflu or outrageous vsage’. The sixth manner asks the sinner to behold the ‘tendre blood of þe yonge childissch membres of Crist, þat was circumcised for þe’. Finally, the seventh approach notes ‘flodes of blood’ dropping from Christ’s feet that keep the sinner from sloth.⁶² Though ostensibly paired up with the seven deadly sins, the word choices used to describe Christ’s blood are distinctly reminiscent of words used to describe menstrual flow – courses, flowing out, drops, and so on. Coupled with the insistence on the avid recollection of the circumcision, this tableau can be seen as a bodily/bloody exchange between Christ and recluse. He assumes her position, and assumes her menstrual cycle, but when he purges his blood – described in terms like hers – it washes away sin and pollution. This is similar to a request made of Christ by the anchoress in *An Orison to God Almihti*, which further includes a reference to her five senses: ‘ase wis liues louerd þeo ilke fif wellen of þine blisful bodie sprungen & striken dun strundes of blode weasch mine fif wittes of all blodie sunnen’⁶³ [just as certainly, life’s Lord, might the same five wells that sprang from thy blissful body and gushed down streams of blood wash my five senses of all their bloody sins]. Her sins are bloody, but Christ’s blood will purify that befouled blood. Although there is not a sensory exchange, a blood exchange does take place. The danger caused by her bloody sins is neutralized.

Blood and Redemption

The Wooing Group prayers anticipate the frenzied blood piety of late medieval Europe in a constructive manner. Building upon already established traditions such as devotion to the Wounded Side and Sacred Heart, these prayers further emphasize the contractual nature of Christ’s blood – ‘I bleed, you survive’ – as well as the purifying qualities. The performative prayers of the Wooing Group deliberately focus on Christ’s blood and wounds. Indeed, the Wooing Group Christ *must* be wounded. In this way, the anchoress can ‘hide’ within Christ’s wounds, mingling her body and his. Through the intermingling of blood and body, the anchoress merges with Christ. The resultant mystic union not only brings the anchoress closer to spiritual perfection, but also preserves her physical body in a manner that

aids her spirituality. Through a totalizing union with Christ within the boundaries of her cell, the anchoress retains her bodily and spiritual purity – because Christ is pierced, she does not have to be. Through holistic substitution, she is redeemed, protected, and purified.

Notes

- ¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p. 6.
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- ³ *Lofsong of ure Lefdi*, ll. 67–68. All translations from the Wooing Group in this essay are taken from my forthcoming volume *The Wohunge Group & A Talkyng of the Loue of God: Translated from the Middle English with Introduction, Notes, and Interpretive Essay*. (Library of Medieval Women). (London: Boydell & Brewer).
- ⁴ For the most complete view of this tradition, see Mary Caroline Spalding's *The Middle English Charters of Christ* (Bryn Mawr College Monographs Series, vol. 15, 1914).
- ⁵ Jill Averil Keen, *The Charters of Christ and Piers Plowman: Documenting Salvation* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), p. 2.
- ⁶ In the heart exchange, the lover's heart is removed and replaced with Christ's heart as a manifestation of their total union. Saints who experienced such an exchange are numerous. Some better known ones include Gertrude of Helfta (1256–1301/2), Dorothea von Montau (1347–94), Catherine of Siena (1347–80), Maria Maddalena de'Pazzi (1566–1607), and Rose of Lima (1586–1617). Michael Camille discusses images of both sacred and profane heart exchanges in *Medieval Art of Love* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998).
- ⁷ *De Wohunge of ure Lauerde*, ll. 94–98.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, ll. 101–2.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, ll. 446–8.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, ll. 551–3.
- ¹¹ *On wel swuðe God Ureisun of God Almihti*, ll. 99–101.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, ll. 111–15; 119–20.
- ¹³ *Fasciculus Morum*. Ed. and trans. Siegfried Wenzel (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1989) pp. 200–1, 222–3.
- ¹⁴ The English text of *Ancrone Wisse*, produced in the thirteenth century (c.1225–40 CE), appears in four manuscripts: MS Corpus Christi College 402; MS Cotton Cleopatra C.vi; MS Cotton Nero A.xiv; and MS Cotton Titus D.xviii. It appears in fragmentary form, and in both Latin and French translation, in fifteen additional manuscripts. For a thorough introduction to the manuscript tradition, see Bella Millett, *Ancrone Wisse: A corrected edition of the text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 402, with variants from other manuscripts*. 2 vols. EETS os 325, 326 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005 and 2006) and E. J. Dobson, *Origins of Ancrone Wisse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

- 15 *Ancrene Wisse*, 6.418–31.
- 16 Savage and Watson, pp. 186–7.
- 17 I discussed these squints in more detail in a conference presentation, ‘Material Constructions of Space, Gaze, and Gender in the Medieval English Anchorhold’, presented at the York Minster Medieval Conference, 16 July 2007.
- 18 *On lofsong of ure Lefdi*, ll. 42–64.
- 19 Nancy Vickers, “‘The Blazon of Sweet Beauty’s Best’: Shakespeare’s *Lucrece*’. In *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*. Eds Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (New York: Methuen, 1985), 95–115 (p. 96).
- 20 Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), p. 70.
- 21 Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 9.
- 22 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, 1991), p. 47.
- 23 *Ancrene Wisse*, Preface, ll. 63–7.
- 24 Savage and Watson, p. 49.
- 25 Patrick Beglan, 1616 CE. Translated by Colmán Ó Clabaigh. Received as a hand-out at the International Anchoritic Society Symposium, Glenstal Abbey, Co. Limerick, Ireland, 13 April 2007.
- 26 Echoes 1 Peter 2:5, wherein the faithful are likened to living stone.
- 27 Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 17.
- 28 *De Wohunge of ure Lauerde*, ll. 590–95; 598–99.
- 29 Anne Savage, ‘The Translation of the Feminine: Untranslatable Dimensions of the Anchoritic Works’. *The Medieval Translator* 4. Eds Roger Ellis and Ruth Evans, (Binghamton, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 181–99 (p. 189).
- 30 Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, p. 14.
- 31 Frank Graziano, *Wounds of Love: The Mystical Marriage of Saint Rose of Lima* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 205.
- 32 Kristen McQuinn, “‘Crepe into that blessed side’: enclosure imagery in Aelred of Rievaulx’s *de Institutione Inclusarum*’. In *Anchorites, Wombs, and Tombs: Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), pp. 95–102 (p. 96).
- 33 McQuinn, ‘Enclosure Imagery’, p. 97.
- 34 *De Wohunge of ure Lauerde*, ll. 572–9.
- 35 Graziano, *Wounds of Love*, p. 205.
- 36 Michael Camille, ‘The Image and the Self: Unwriting Late Medieval Bodies’. In *Framing Medieval Bodies*. Ed. Susan Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 77.
- 37 K.B. Stockton’s *God Between Their Lips: Desire Between Women in Irigaray, Brontë, and Eliot* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).
- 38 See Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), pp. 86–126. Lacan argues that the subject is constructed through interaction with an external

system of representation (language). Since subjectivity is inscribed and structured externally, the subject's agency is always indirect, accomplished through an Other. See Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*. Trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977).

- 39 Emma Campbell, 'Sacrificial Spectacle and Interpassive Vision in the Anglo-Norman Life Of Saint Faith'. In *Troubled Vision: Gender, Sexuality, and Sight in Medieval Text and image*. Ed. Emma Campbell and Robert Mills. (New York: Palgrave, 2004), p. 108.
- 40 Campbell, 'Sacrificial Spectacle', p. 109.
- 41 Peggy McCracken, *The Curse of Eve, The Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p. 117.
- 42 McCracken, *The Curse of Eve*, p. 7. In reference to: Hoffman, Lawrence A. *Covenant of Blood: Gender and Circumcision in Rabbinic Judaism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), esp. p. 135.
- 43 Dorothy Whitelock, ed. *English Historical Documents, I: c. 500–1042*. (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1955), p. 359.
- 44 See *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: A Translation of the Libri Poenitentiales*. Eds. John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938; rpt. 1990).
- 45 See Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).
- 46 Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment*, pp. 50–6.
- 47 Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 197.
- 48 Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment*, p. 126.
- 49 Cynthia Hahn, *Portrayed on the Heart: Narrative Effect in Pictorial Lives of Saints from the Tenth through the Thirteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 90.
- 50 *Ancrene Wisse* 7:93–5, Savage and Watson 201–2.
- 51 Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption* (New York: Zone, 1992), esp. p. 132.
- 52 *Be Lofsong of ure Louerde*, ll. 47–53.
- 53 *Eyre of London* 88. This case is also discussed in: Barbara Hanawalt, 'Of Good and Ill Repute': *Gender and Social Control in Medieval England* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- 54 J. G. Bellamy, *Crime and Public Order in Later Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1980); p. 172.
- 55 *Be Wohunge of ure Lauerde*, ll. 502–3; 505–16.
- 56 *Be Lofsong of ure Louerde*, ll. 48–50.
- 57 *A Talkyng of the Loue of God*, ll. 14–15, 19–20.
- 58 Paula Rieder, *On the Purification of Women: Churching in Northern France, 1100–1500* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), p. 65.
- 59 This condition is connected to what became called 'greensickness', a peculiar malady thought to affect women who were overly desirous of 'venery' (sex). In this case, it was believed that in order to be completely healthy, women had to release

excess build up through orgasm. This was, of course, ‘impossible’ for religiously vowed women to accomplish, so other methods were devised to release the excess, such as manual masturbation by an experienced midwife and bloodletting. *Ancrene Wisse* suggests bloodletting. For more about the lesbian implications of this situation, see my article ‘Representing the Negative: Positing the Lesbian Void and Medieval English Anchoritism’. *thirdspace* 3.2(2004): 70–88. For more about greensickness and related syndromes, see, among other sources, Valerie Traub. *Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and *The Trotula: An English Translation of the Medieval Compendium of Women’s Medicine*. Ed. and trans. Monica H. Green (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

⁶⁰ Menstruation in the Middle Ages is a subject shrouded in mystery and debate. At least some Church authorities considered menstrual blood inherently corrupted and polluted. The controversial thirteenth century medieval work *De Secritis Mulierum* reports that a menstruating woman was considered ‘so full of venom’ that they poisoned children, tarnished mirrors, and infected sexual partners with leprosy, and cause men to lose their voice – all by merely standing next to them. Menstrual blood was also viewed as having dangerous transformative powers, such as the ability to change substances. See Helen Rodnite Lemay, ed. and trans. *Women’s Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus’s De Secretis Mulierum with Commentaries* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), esp. p. 60 and pp. 130–2; Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset. *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*. Trans. Matthew Adamson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988; Fr. org. 1985); Stephen R. Ell, ‘Blood and Sexuality in Medieval Leprosy’, *Janus* 7 (1984): 153–64; Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 1966), esp. pp. 39–41 and 138–40.

⁶¹ Rieder, *On the Purification of Women*, p. 65.

⁶² *The Myrour of Recluses*. Ed. Marta Powell Harley (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1995). I have also consulted the manuscript: London, British Library, MS Royal A.v. See ll. 904–47.

⁶³ *An Orison to God Almihti*, ll. 110–15.

Transvestism in the Anchorhold

SARAH SALIH

Caroline Walker Bynum's claim, in *Jesus as Mother*, that 'religious males had a problem' has become perversely foundational to recent analyses of medieval erotic mysticism in particular and of medieval sexuality in general. Queer readings are regularly built on critique of this formulation of a 'problem'. As Bynum defines it, the monks' dilemma was that 'if the God with whom they wished to unite was spoken of in male language, it was hard to use the metaphor of sexual union unless they saw themselves as female.'¹ Or, as she did not say, unless they spoke of sexual union between males. Bynum acknowledges that a few such men did succeed in writing homoerotic mystic scenes, but is primarily interested in exploring the consequences of their attempts to heterosexualize their approach to God. Their strategies included the adoption of feminine personae, such as Anima, for themselves; concentrating affective devotions on a feminine object, usually the Virgin Mary; or, most boldly, feminizing God. All these manoeuvres have the effect of ensuring a relationship between worshipper and deity based on sexual difference, a difference which is secured by allowing gender identity to be fluid. Either worshipper or deity may occupy the masculine or the feminine position, and either of them may change position.

Bynum's analysis influenced a generation of scholarship on gender in medieval religion, but the heterosexist presumption of the discussion of the monks' 'problem' has been repeatedly critiqued. Richard Rambuss observes that it contributed to 'the obfuscating turn away from devotional envisionings of the body's homoerotic possibilities'; Karma Lochrie argues that 'the queer desire of female mystics for the feminized body of Christ is excluded by Bynum's interpretation'; Robert Mills, considering male

mystics, likewise finds the analysis exemplary of 'the ways in which queer possibilities continue to be checked, censured and circumscribed'.² Bynum's conception of the monks' 'problem' projects a distinctly modern homophobia back into a medieval past which, according to constructionist narratives of sexuality, might have preceded the formation of the concepts of homosexuality, heterosexuality and homophobia. Lochrie's further exploration of the historicity of sexuality asks: 'if heteronormativity did not exist in the Middle Ages, what happens to deviant sexualities?'³ If the medieval preceded the heteronormative, then sexual acts and sexual identities were not categorized as either hetero- or homosexual. James A. Schultz⁴ concurs with this analysis, arguing that if it is anachronistic to speak of medieval homosexuality, then the twin concept of heterosexuality is equally out of place.⁵ If indeed there is no norm, there is no deviance: if heteronormativity was not in operation, it might not have occurred to monks that their desire for a male God constituted a sexual problem. Certainly there is a body of bridal mysticism by men which appears to be free of heteronormative anxiety. For example, Bernard of Clairvaux's commentary on the Song of Songs describes his own experience of being loved by God: 'He is life and power, and as soon as he enters in, he awakes my slumbering soul; he stirs and soothes and pierces my heart, for before it was as hard as stone, and diseased.'⁶ Although both Bride and soul are mentioned in this sermon as the entities which experience mystical union, Bernard speaks of this divine penetration and arousal in his own person, and there is no indication that he feels feminized by the process. Clearly, here and elsewhere, for a man so to write is not, in fact, a problem. Mystical desire had the option of regendering its participants to produce sexual difference, but also had the option not to.

I intend to look for the presence or absence of heteronormativity in the four Middle English meditations of the Wooing Group, *On wel swuðe God Ureisun of God Almihti*, *On Lofsong of Ure Louerde*, *On Lofsong of Ure Lefdi*, and *Þe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*. The author or authors of all the texts are anonymous: the author of *Ancrene Wisse* was certainly a cleric, most likely a Dominican friar, who may or may not have also written some or all of the Wooing and Katherine Groups.⁷ The female voice of the Wooing Group appears to raise the possibility that one or more of its texts may have been composed by an anchoress, a figure enthusiastically extrapolated from the text by W. Meredith Thompson as 'a woman of privileged birth ... who had suffered some sharp reversal, was deserted by kith and kin, had constantly to struggle against world, flesh and devil because of a passionate nature'.⁸ The ghost of this hypothesis survives in Catherine Innes-Parker,

Elizabeth Robertson and Michelle M. Sauer's tentative support for the idea of a female author.⁹ However, there is no firm evidence for a female author, and considerable circumstantial evidence against it. Recent editors of the anchoritic texts, including E. J. Dobson, Bella Millett, Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson, have all concluded that the author (or authors, though I shall continue to use the singular for convenience) of the Wooing Group was probably male.¹⁰

This consensus notwithstanding, the last reading of any of the anchoritic texts to centre on a presumptive male author was Robertson's 1990 study of *Ancrene Wisse* and the Katherine Group, which saw the whole corpus as promoting a systematically dumbed-down spirituality. Its characteristic combination of concrete, especially domestic, imagery and bridal affect, she argues, were what the author(s) considered appropriate to the limited intellectual capacities of women readers who were 'inescapably trapped in their bodies, essentially wilful, dependent on the senses, and incapable of theorizing'.¹¹ Most subsequent criticism of the texts has resisted this argument, finding greater value in the spirituality of the texts and a more respectful, dialogic, relationship between author and audience. Savage argues that it is likely that the readers of *Ancrene Wisse* were 'directly or indirectly, significantly responsible for the organization and recomposition of this material', and thus that the texts can be considered as products of 'communal authorship'.¹² The argument is consistent with other critical treatments which acknowledge the likelihood of a male author, but go on to co-opt the meditations, or the whole corpus of anchoritic texts, as honorary women's writing. Susannah Chewning, for example, asks why a misogynist author should bother to write so extensively for women, and argues:

the biological sex of the author is really not at issue here at all. *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd* is a poem in which the persona or speaker is certainly female, or at the very least she describes herself using feminine pronouns. If the speaker is feminine, then it might be argued that the voice is disruptive of established codes of masculine power.¹³

Readings of the texts in the contexts of women's writing and women's devotion acknowledge the extent to which their form and content are tailored to the needs and concerns of their original audience, but have the disadvantage of relegating the male author to invisibility. I would suggest that an inquiry into the texts' place in the history of sexuality needs to bring him back into view. The arguments for the *Ancrene Wisse* author's respect and affection for his audience are persuasive, but it may also be that Robertson was right to argue that the fact that these texts were written by

men, for women, is fundamental to understanding them. The issue is not only how the author(s) felt about the women in their care, but also what use they could make of the figure of the holy woman.

All the anchoritic texts combine bridal devotion to Christ with celebration of committed female virginity. Christ is the preferred lover of the three virgin martyr saints of the Katherine Group, for whose sake they reject earthly marriage; his superiority to earthly husbands is spelt out in the treatise *Hali Meiðhad*, while *Ancrene Wisse* includes an extended parable of Christ as chivalric suitor to besieged humanity. The Wooing Group's three first-person addresses to Christ, *On wel swuðe God Ureisun of God Almihti*, *On Lofsong of Ure Louerde*, and *Be Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, are the most intensely emotive and sensual versions of the *topos*. *Sponsalia Christi* is, ostensibly, a distinctly feminine and heterosexual form of mystical eroticism. When female recluses describe themselves as brides of Christ, their notional and actual gender identities coincide, so that the regendering which male mystics undergo is unnecessary. Hence the practice can be held to reinforce binary gender and a heteronormative devotional pattern. Savage argues that the *Wohunge*'s emphasis on 'Christ's masculine beauty, strength and superiority as a lover' is 'particularly directed at a female audience'; John Bugge that 'as emphasis on Christ's humanity focused attention on his male sexuality, so the latter provoked increased interest in the femaleness of the professed virgin.'¹⁴

An alternative critical approach is to use queer theory to argue that, at least in the anchoritic texts, *sponsalia Christi* does not produce secure gender identities. Chewing finds that sexual difference exists but is systematically exchanged between the participants:

The mystic, once she has appropriated a sense of masculinity from her participation in the text and in the mystical experience itself, becomes the wooer and is endowed with masculine characteristics. However, once the experience of mysticism actually takes place, the genders shift again from masculine wooer of feminine Divine to masculine, knightly Divine and submissive, feminized mystic.¹⁵

I have previously argued that the relationship between Christ and his lovers in the Katherine and Wooing Groups is constitutive of virginity and that both he and they are 'multiply gendered'.¹⁶ Queer analyses to date, however, are based on the assumption that the voice of the texts is primarily that of a female mystic, whose gender is then complicated in the practice of desire for Christ. Sauer's comparison of the *Wohunge* to its later, masculinized, adaptation in *A Talkyng of the Loue of God* contrasts the *Wohunge*'s

‘female mystic voice’ with the ‘homoerotic turn’ and “‘cross-dressing” souls’ that emerge only in *A Talkyng*, where the speaking voice is explicitly masculine.¹⁷

The Wooing Group, then, is amenable to queer readings, but these have not been concerned with the men who probably wrote and – since the *Wohunge* must have attracted male readers in order to be transformed into *A Talkyng*, can be assumed to have read – the texts. Bugge suggested that *On Lofsong of Ure Lauerd* was ‘surely composed by a man for a male audience’ and is thus an anomaly in the Wooing Group.¹⁸ However, while it is true that the *Lofsong*’s attention to the body of Christ is less detailed than that of the *Wohunge* or the *Ureisun*, this is not a reliable indicator of a male audience, and the text’s presence in BL MS Cotton Nero A.xiv – an anthology of *Ancrene Wisse*, three Wooing Group and other devotional texts which was definitely intended for an audience of reclusive women – indicates that it was considered appropriate for women.¹⁹ Bugge’s distinction has not to my knowledge been taken up by other critics. The gender of the speaker of the texts goes unspecified for lengthy passages. The voices of the three meditations to Christ are intermittently marked as feminine, once as ‘lauedi’ and once as ‘hore’ in the *Wohunge*, once speaking from ‘meiðhod’ (virginity) in *Lofsong of Ure Louerde*.²⁰ But the voice also speaks with St Paul in *Ureisun* (l. 123) and with ‘þe salmewrihte’ (David) in the *Wohunge* (l. 581). *Ureisun* uses masculine pronouns to refer to a notional lover of Christ, in passages such as ‘he mot scotten efne efter his euene’ (he must pay his share equally) (l. 72). This is probably gender-neutral rather than specifically masculine, but certainly permits a male lover. If one looks through the female speaker to the male author, or if one simply forgets about the speaker and imagines a male voice, it is possible to read the group as an address from one male to another, with very few incongruous moments.

The immediate result of imagining the male author as the speaker of the texts is that they appear to be powerfully homoerotic. The author’s own sexual preferences are beyond retrieval, but the textual preference of the group as a whole is firmly for addressing an at least ostensibly masculine object. One of the very few things we can say with any certainty about the author of the *Wohunge* was that he was very skilled indeed at composing sensually impassioned addresses to Christ. The *Wohunge* opens:

Iesu swete iesu . mi druð . mi der-
ling . mi drihtin . mi healand
mi huniter. mi haliwei . Swet
ter is munegunge of þe þen

mildeu o muðe . Hwa ne mei
 luue þi luueli leor? Hwat her
 te is swa hard þat ne mei to mel
 te iþe munegunge of þe? Ah
 hwa ne mej luue þe luueli-
 che iesu? for inwið þe ane arn
 alle þe þinges igedered þat eauer
 muhen maken ani mon lu-
 uewurði to oðer . feirnesse &
 lufsum neb . flesch hwit under
 schrude makes moni mon beo
 luued.²¹

(Jesus, sweet Jesus, my dear, my darling, my lord, my saviour, my honeydrop, my medicine. The memory of you is sweeter than honey in my mouth. Who could not love your lovely look? What heart is so hard that it would not melt to remember you? How could I not love you, lovely Jesus? For in you alone are gathered together all the qualities which have ever made any man desirable to another. Beauty, a lovely face, white flesh beneath the clothes make many men beloved.²²)

By contrast, *On Lofsong of Ure Lefdi* and the portion of *On wel swuðe God Ureisun of God Almihti* which addresses the Virgin Mary are much less emotional and sensual. They lack the references to taste and touch, and Mary is addressed primarily as one who can intercede with her son. The *Lofsong of Ure Lefdi*, indeed, looks straight through Mary to another evocation of the suffering Christ, asking her intercession ‘bi þe holie rode . bi his side openunge . bi his blodi Rune þet ron inne monie studen . In umbe keoruunge’²³ (by the holy cross; by the open wound in his side; by his streaming blood that ran in many directions; by his circumcision).

The *Wohunge* can thus be used to answer Mills’s question: ‘What does it signify when a male mystic desires and adores the (un)feminised body of Christ? What does it mean when religious men lust after Christ’s tortured body and demand that it hold them, kiss them, even penetrate them in return?’²⁴ The analysis must begin by looking at Christ: indeed, in the Wooing Group, everything must begin with looking at Christ, the glorious sight at the centre of the cosmos. To borrow a term from Schultz’s analysis of romance, he is an ‘aphrodisiac body’: more than a passive object of desire, he actively incites loving gazes.²⁵ His utter lovability stretches the resources of the language: ‘þu ert so leoflich . so louelich . & so lufsum . þet te engles euer biholdið þe . ne ne beon neuer ful . forto logon on þe. Iesu al feir’²⁶ (you are also so beloved, so lovely and so lovable that the angels

ever gaze at you; nor are they ever sated with looking at you. Jesus all fair.²⁷) His body both is and is not feminized. He is feminized in a passage of *Ureisun* which imagines him as a loving mother, embracing his children. In the *Wohunge* he is subjected to penetration: ‘Bringen forð longis wið þat brade scharpe spere . he þurles his side cleues tat herte’²⁸ (they bring forth Longinus, with that broad, sharp spear. He pierces his side, cleaves that heart),²⁹ which opens up the interior of his body for inspection: ‘swete iesu þu oppnes me þin herte for to cnawe witerliche & in to redden trewe luue lettres’³⁰ (sweet Jesus you open your heart to me so I may know it intimately and read true love letters within it).³¹ However, this penetrability does not necessarily produce a feminized Christ or masculinized speaker: as Rambuss points out, male bodies have their own orifices, and there is a long history of representing Christ’s in particular as ‘both penetrated and penetrating’.³² Nor does penetration establish difference between Christ and the speaker, for the speaker too is permeable, rejoicing in *Ureisun* that ‘crist lieweð in me . þuruh his wuniinde grace’³³ (Christ lives in me through his indwelling grace).³⁴

The two halves of the *Wohunge* juxtapose Christ in his perfection with Christ suffering, a contrast of classical and grotesque male bodies which is repeated in smaller-scale units throughout the Passion meditation. The first half of the *Wohunge* describes him according to a standard of masculine desirability derived from courtly discourses, in which both men and women admire aristocratic male beauty, worth and prowess. Having rhapsodized on Christ’s attractions, the *Wohunge* then becomes fascinated by the spectacle of such strength and beauty suffering:

Siðen before pilat hu þu was naket bunden faste to þe piler . þet tu ne mihtes nowhwider wrenche fra þa dundes . þer þu wes for mi luue wið cnotti swepes swungen swa þet ti luueliche lich mihte beo to torn & to rent . & al þi blisfule bodi streamed on a Girre blod.³⁵

(then, before Pilate, how you were stripped, bound fast to the pillar, so that you could in no way flinch from the blows; there you were beaten with knotted whips for my love, so that your lovely body could be all torn and rent; and all your blessed body flowed with one bloody stream.³⁶)

Christ’s body here is liquescent, on the point of dissolution, but somehow still lovely throughout its ordeal. The contrast between this terrible vulnerability and the glorious, luminous body celebrated in the first part is at the heart of the texts’ devotion. This passage does not explicitly gender Christ, but its impact is the stronger if this violence is done to the imaginatively dominant and impermeable male body.

Sauer's analysis of *Talkyng* finds that 'the monk is both wooer and wooed, and ... Jesus alternates these roles with him', and that the relationship is imagined as an equal companionship.³⁷ This is also true of the Wooing Group, which consistently imagines love to be mutual. The speaker of *Ureisun* finds he must make the first move if he is to be worthy of Christ's embrace: 'weneð ei to beon bi clupped bitweonen þine blisfulle ermes in heouene . bute he worpe . er her him be tweonen þine rewðful ermes oðe rode'³⁸ (And does anyone believe they will be embraced between these joyful arms in heaven, unless here they first throw themselves between your pitiful arms on the cross?³⁹) By loving Christ, the speaker hopes to emulate him: Christ will share his wealth and power with his faithful lover, and his courage will teach the speaker too to be bold (*Wohunge*, ll. 101, 157). Desire is interwoven with identification. The speaker of *Wohunge* imagines that his body and Christ's double or can interchange with one another:

Nu min herte mai to breke . min ehne flowen al o water. A nu is mi lefmon demd for to deien . A nu mon ledes him forð to munte caluarie to þe cwalm stowe. A lo he beres his rode up on his bare schuldres . & lef þa dundes drepem me þat tai þe dunchen.⁴⁰

(Now my heart can break apart, my eyes all overflow with water. Ah! Now is my lover condemned to die! Ah! now they lead him toward Mount Calvary, to the death-place. Ah! See, he bears his cross upon his bare shoulders – and, beloved, would that those blows would fall on me with which they strike you.⁴¹)

Here the speaker draws closer to Christ as he looks and speaks: a third-person description is supplanted by a direct address, in which the speaker imaginatively enters the scene and puts himself in Christ's place. Each volunteers to suffer for, and take the place of, the other.

The alternation of activity and passivity is not necessarily disruptive of gender positions: it may instead mark the difference between mystical eros, in which the Bride had always spoken active desire, and merely human sex, which was, as Ruth Mazo Karras puts it, 'something that one person did to another', with the positions of the doer and the done very strongly associated with the masculine and the feminine.⁴² None of this requires a female speaker/observer, or a feminized Christ: it is perfectly intelligible as a male–male scenario and congruent with other male devotions, such as Richard Rolle's, which also, as Mills argues, establishes a mutually penetrative relationship between Christ and the soul.⁴³ It is erotic, but not, intrinsically, either hetero- or homoerotic, and not so much gender-bending

as gender-indifferent. This experiment produces a variant on the existing readings rather than a completely new one. It confirms the exchange and mutuality, the active energy of the speaker's desire, which many critics have noted. However, it also suggests that the gender of the anchoress-speaker might seem fluid because she was never very firmly gendered in the first place, but was a persona adopted by a male author who found it proper or convenient to cast this literary exercise in a female voice. The Group is thus an exercise in literary transvestism, and the figure of the anchoress obscures the male-male scenario which lies beneath the male-female one.

However, a reading which occludes the female speaker is no more satisfactory than one which occludes the male author. A fuller reading needs to keep them both in view, and to consider why, if the approach to Christ is not in itself gender-specific, the author chose to write it for her voice rather than for his own. The end of the *Wohunge* indicates that both he and she existed as historical persons, and permits inferences about their investments in its composition and performance:

Prei for me mi leue suster . þis haue I written þe for þi þat wordes ofte quemen þe heorte to þenken on ure lauerd And for þi hwen þu art on eise carpe toward iesu & seie þise wordes . & þenc as tah he heng beside þe blodi up o rode . And he þurh his grace opne þin heorte to his luee & to reowðe of his pine.⁴⁴

(Pray for me, my dear sister. I have written this for you because words often move the heart to think on our lord. And so when you are at ease, speak to Jesus and say these words, and think as though he hung beside you, bloodied upon the cross. Through his grace he opens your heart to his love and to pity of his pain.⁴⁵)

The meditation, then, is a stimulus to mystical experience rather than a record of it. The statement that words move the heart to think on Christ seems to come from experience and surely applies as much, if not more, to the writing as to the reading and performance of the poem. The author, murmuring aloud 'Iesu swete iesu . mi druð . mi derling . mi drihtin' as he wrote, must have been moved to think of Christ hanging beside him and had his heart opened to up to his love. The author's and the sister's devotions are interactive, forming a love triangle, with gendered identities layered over one another. Speaking the wooing, the anchoress speaks the words of a man writing as a woman. In giving her this script, he introduces her to Christ, providing her with the incantation which will make him manifest as she speaks them. So in writing it he visualized her interaction with Christ as well as his own: and when she speaks it she will remember this.

During the meditative exercise she will think of him who wrote it, and visualize him visualizing her speaking it and calling Christ's love into being. Author and sister need one another and imaginatively produce each other's access to Christ as well as their own. They must identify with one another's desires in the process of writing or speaking their own. The consensual understanding of the Wooing Group, that one or more men wrote the texts for one or more women is probably true, but, I suggest, it is not the whole truth: the author also wrote them for himself, but needed her to enable him to do so. Their relationship is intimate and interdependent, but still based on a division of labour. He, attentive to his dear sister's need for spiritual affect, scripts; she, obedient to her beloved director's instruction, performs.

The eros of the anchorhold is complex. Its pleasures are not exclusively female, nor exclusively homoerotic: the fantasized love triangle of writer, speaker, Christ is a package which includes all possible gender combinations. It looks, to modern sensibilities, very queer indeed, but actually may be normal for mystical eros. Loving Christ is a collaborative experience as well as an individual one: the purpose of a collection of texts such as the Wooing Group is to share the knowledge of this love. And yet these layered interactions are visible only on reflection: what is visible on the surface is the ostensibly natural love of a virgin- anchoress-Bride and a Christ-knight-Bridegroom with which most readings of the Wooing Group begin. The question of why, if heteronormativity is ruled out, this should have appeared to be the most appropriate face of mystical eros remains open.

One possibility is that some of the specifically marital aspects of the *Wohunge's* approach to Christ fit more easily with a female speaker. Michel Foucault argues that pre-modern marriage was not, as it was later to become, that which is unscrutinized because it is taken for granted: 'The sex of husbands and wives was beset by rules and recommendations. The marriage relation was the most intense focus of constraints; it was spoken of more than anything else; more than any other relation, it was required to give a detailed accounting of itself.'⁴⁶ Medieval marriage was not identical to modern heteronormativity: it did not have a single opposite number of homosexuality, but was flanked on either side by chastity and whoredom. However, it was a culturally central mechanism for institutionalizing and regulating sexual difference. The first half of the *Wohunge* is not just bridal – a form of approach to Christ which can be enjoyed by men or women – but marital, sharing with the rest of the anchoritic corpus a legal and literal conception of *sponsalia Christi*. Erotic encounters in all gender combinations are possible, but only a woman may marry a husband and be invested with his rank and property.

The female voice also functions to protect not sexuality, but gender. Recent scholarship has outlined the extent to which late medieval devotion was shaped by masculine investments in holy women: Watson finds 'educated men taking refuge from scholasticism by imagining in holy women a simplicity of feeling and a focus on the body that was not necessarily there'.⁴⁷ Clerics used holy women to embody certain forms of Christian devotion, particularly to have them be concrete, bridal, erotic, bodily and suffering, and were often more committed to gendering this piety as female than were the women themselves.⁴⁸ Protecting gender means also protecting another distinction, that between lay and clerical, which here happens to coincide with the boundary between female and male. Men and women need one another because the forms of devotion suitable to unlettered women are different from those suitable to learned men. Thus the anchorhold was not an exclusively female space, but also a repository for the excess of clerical affects.

However, gender may not have been the only consideration. It is finally the speaker's, not the writer's, body which is able to 'henge wið þi bodi' (*Wöhunge*, ll. 590–1), hang with [Christ's] body, but by virtue of her enclosure, 'sperrd querfaste wið inne fowr wahes' (ll. 591–3) (enclosed on all sides by four walls) rather than because of her gender. Anchoritism, acknowledged to be the hardest and most perfect form of life, produces a devotional elite who are able to approach Christ for themselves and also on behalf of others. In *De Institutis Inclusarum* Aelred of Rievaulx was explicit about why his sister was a useful vehicle for his visionary exercises, telling her: 'you, virgin, who can feel more confidence with the Virgin's Son than the women who stand at a distance, draw near to the Cross with the Virgin Mother and the virgin disciple.'⁴⁹ Aelred, who was not a virgin, is implicitly hanging back with the 'women who stand at a distance'; it is not gender but sexual history which disbars him from fuller participation in Brideship. In both cases the more spiritually deserving person is permitted to get closer to the divine.

There are, then, various reasons other than the observation of heteronormativity why the author might have preferred to approach Christ in female dress. *Ancrene Wisse's* treatment of sexual sins confirms that the basic assumptions of the anchoritic texts are not heteronormative. Its instruction on guarding the window is emphatic about the danger of familiarity with men – 'Ne leue na / mon ancre þe let in monnes ehe to schawin hire seoluen'⁵⁰ (Let no one trust in the anchoress who lets in a man's eye and shows herself⁵¹) – and then drops in a much-cited, but cryptic, passage relating to women:

To wummon þe wilneð hit, openið ow o godes half;
 3ef ha ne spekeð nawt þrof, leoteð swa iwurðen, bute 3ef 3e
 dreden þet heo þrefter beo iscandlet. Of hire ahne suster
 haueð sum beon itemptet.⁵²

(To a woman who desires it, open, for God's sake. If she says nothing about it, let it be, unless you are afraid that she may be offended later. Some have been tempted by their own sisters.⁵³)

The line of thought which connects the woman at the window with the sister in the anchorhold is not explicit, nor is the nature of any possible shock or temptation. Aelred, a source for *Ancrene Wisse*, may help to clarify the meaning. Aelred warns his sister:

Do not think this means that a man cannot be defiled without a woman or a woman without a man, since that abominable sin which inflames a man with passion for a man or a woman for a woman meets with more relentless condemnation than any other crime. But virginity is often lost and chastity outraged without any commerce with another if the flesh is set on fire by a strong heat which subdues the will and takes the members by surprise.⁵⁴

Aelred assumes his sister to believe, naively, that sexual danger to a woman will always arrive in the form of a man, and so finds it necessary to warn her that homoerotic and autoerotic possibilities exist and must be recognized as sexual if they are to be resisted. The *Ancrene Wisse* passage seems to be making a similar point about the multiple forms of sexual temptation in more guarded terms. These warnings do not show modern concepts of individual sexual identities to have been in operation: the point is that an anchoress might be susceptible to erotic stimulus from a man, a woman, herself or even, as it later transpires, 'a ladles þing' (innocent thing).⁵⁵ However, they do show an assumption that sex is usually expected to be between a man and a woman. This is not a heterosexuality, because sexual difference is not the issue: men and women are more like each other than women and women, less like each other than women and things. It is more likely to be a distinction between sins which are natural and those which are against nature. *Ancrene Wisse* makes great play with the unspeakability of the subcategories of sexual sin, but the criterion of 'nature' is common in penitentials, such as *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, in which '3if þe synne be bi weye of kynde or azens kynde' is one of several criteria for assessing its severity.⁵⁶ Homophobia in the modern sense can be ruled out, but application of a distinction between natural and unnatural may have had the same effect of making a female voice seem the appropriate vehicle for the love of Christ.

These are all, of course, speculative suggestions: there is no way of knowing why the *Wohunge* author organized the genders of mystical eros as he did, or why other writers used the *topos* differently. Simon Gaunt examined attitudes to potentially homoerotic material with reference to the reception of the *Roman de la Rose*, in particular to the figure of Bel Aceuil, a masculine personification of an aspect of a female character, courted by the poem's protagonist. The text hence 'generates conflict between the literal (homosexual) and the allegorical (heterosexual) plots'.⁵⁷ Using the illuminated manuscripts of the poem to track reception, Gaunt demonstrates that medieval readers were conscious of this conflict and had various responses to it. Some illuminators and redactors seem to have been sufficiently troubled by the homoerotic scenario to 'straighten out' the allegory by feminizing Bel Aceuil in the images and even the text.⁵⁸ Other illuminators, however, produce images more unambiguously homoerotic than the text.⁵⁹ Readers of the poem thus faced the option of refusing or engaging with its homoeroticism, and evidently diverged in their response. In this example, the bifurcated response shows that there was a binary choice between male–male and male–female erotic scenes.

Religious men writing mystical eros also had a choice. The obligation to minister to holy women provided clerics with opportunities to imagine themselves in feminine positions. Not all clerics accepted this invitation. Bernard may have adopted the persona of the Bride himself, but Abelard, his contemporary, eschewed it. Writing to Heloise, he insisted that when she took the veil:

you became my superior from the day you became my lady on becoming the bride of my Lord ... By the privilege of this honour you are set not only over your former husband but over every servant of that king. So you should not be surprised if I commend myself in life as in death to the prayers of your community, seeing that in common law it is accepted that wives are better able than their households to intercede with their husbands, being ladies rather than servants.⁶⁰

Abelard's use of the *topos* of Brideship relies on the stability of the gender identities of all three parties: Heloise, not Abelard, must be the Bride, for only a woman can occupy that position. Their devotional positions are entirely continuous with their embodied selves, an approach consistent with the strategy of 'remasculinization' which Martin Irvine identifies in Abelard's autobiographical writing following his castration.⁶¹ Similarly, Goscelin, though comfortable enough with gender-variant imagery to describe himself as the 'mother soul who gave birth to you with heaving womb', could only observe, not participate, as Eva 'walked up to the Lord's wedding'.⁶²

The Wooing Group is closer to Abelard than to Bernard in the at least nominal placing of a female speaker as the Bride, but it has a much more elaborated identification with that position. Abelard, imagining the Bride and Bridegroom's embrace, does so from the point of view of a husband, appreciating the tactile pleasures of a dark woman's soft flesh.⁶³ The *Lofsong of ure Lauerd*, however, insists on speaking, and being, the Bride:

leue me ðet ich mote soðliche seg
 gen wið ðe meiden þet of þe seið þeors wor
 des . Mi leofmonnes luft erm halt up mine hea
 ued heo seið . & his riht erm schal bi-clupen
 me abuten . let me beo þi leouemon & siggen
 ase heo seið⁶⁴

(grant me that I may truly speak with the maiden who said these words about you: 'My beloved's left arm holds up my head', and she says, 'and his right arm will hold me tight [Canticles 2:6]. Let me be your beloved, and say as she says.⁶⁵)

Some writers, then, are happy to write a male bride and male bridegroom; others adjust it with the effect, and one can reasonably presume, with the intention, of evading this scenario. There was a choice to be made, and that the *Wohunge* author chose a female persona to speak his address to Christ, I would suggest, enables us to trace an anxiety which, though it is not to be identified with modern homophobia, results in a preference for a female speaker to meditate on the love of Christ. Perhaps he did, after all, think that there was a problem, and one to which the solution was the holy woman under his guidance.

Notes

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- ¹⁸ Bugge, *Virginitas*, 108.
- ¹⁹ See *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, ed. Thompson, pp. xi–xii for the contents of the manuscript and A. S. G. Edwards, ‘The Middle English manuscripts and early readers of *Ancrene Wisse*’, in Wada, p. 108 on its readership.
- ²⁰ *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, ed. Thompson, ll. 84, 277, 87. Further references to this edition will be indicated by parentheses in the texts.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, ll. 1–16.
- ²² Savage and Watson, pp. 247–8.
- ²³ *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, ll. 55–7.
- ²⁴ Mills, ‘*Ecce homo*’, p. 157.
- ²⁵ Schultz, *Courtly Love*, p. 18.
- ²⁶ *On wel swuðe God Ureisun of God Almihti*, ll. 8–11.
- ²⁷ Savage and Watson, p. 322.
- ²⁸ *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, ll. 541–3.
- ²⁹ Savage and Watson, p. 255.
- ³⁰ *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, ll. 546–9.
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- ³⁵ *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, ll. 473–81.
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- ³⁸ *On wel swuðe God Ureisun of God Almihti*, ll. 58–62.
- ³⁹ Savage and Watson, p. 323.
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- ⁴⁸ Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), pp. 26–39; Catherine M. Mooney, ‘Voice, gender and the portrayal of sanctity’, in *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and their Interpreters*, ed. Catherine Mooney (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 1–15 (pp. 12–13).
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- ⁵³ Savage and Watson, p. 71.
- ⁵⁴ Aelred, ‘Rule of Life’, 64.
- ⁵⁵ *Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Millett, p. 21.
- ⁵⁶ *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, EETS os 217, ed. W. Nelson Francis (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), p. 178.
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- ⁵⁸ Gaunt, ‘Bel Aceuil’, pp. 75–8.
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- ⁶⁰ *Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, trans. Betty Radice (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003), p. 73.
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- ⁶² Goscelin of St Bertin, *The Book of Encouragement and Consolation*, trans. Monika Otter (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), pp. 26, 23.
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The Wooing Group: Pain, Pleasure and the Anchoritic Body

ANNE SAVAGE

The *Wooing* Group prose lyrics exist within a grand romance narrative of desire and the goal of consummation, a narrative engaging The Song of Songs and its allegorical readings to the thirteenth century along with contemporary secular and religious courtly modes in which love is a force binding persons together, both in marriage and in sexual love outside marriage. The lyrics invoke, in the service of this relationship, the language of sexual passion, self-sacrifice, economic exchange, power and dependence. They owe a narrative debt to medieval versions of the life of Christ, and its participatory readings or imitation,¹ the history of which is addressed by Bella Millett's chapter in this volume; these lyrics owe their framework of discourse to the affective dimensions of sweetness, heat and suffering as expressed in troubadour and trouvère lyrics as well as those to the Virgin Mary. The dialogue of passion inherited from the Song of Songs scrolls out and curls up at the edges in multigendered, intertextual love-talk throughout the later Middle Ages from Bernard of Clairvaux's rationalized intellectual commentary on 'the kisses of his mouth' to *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, and, later, to the voluptuous mystical poetry of St John of the Cross, as well as in the vast repertoire of secular love-lyrics and romance. Desire, the promise of fulfilment and ultimate union gained simultaneous currency in religious and secular discourse.

This paper discusses the role of emotion in the life of the anchoress, in particular the engagement of her passions by the *Wooing* Group texts. Meredith W. Thompson comments that the manuscript pointing of *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd* suggests that the terms of endearment are to be

'lingered over'.² Such a reading posits not simply an affective reading, but, over time, a distillation of affect, drop by drop, to be collected in the soul over a lifetime: emotional experiences which educate the passions. In the imagined presence of the lover, the recluse approaches his wooing and suffering through sensualized reading which underlines a physical conception of affect, rather than a rational abstraction. The intellectual reworking of Augustine's faculties of the soul by Cistercians like Aelred re-examined and redefined affect itself as two-sided: a natural, involuntary impulse of desire, and affective love rooted in the will; we know that emotion is a bodily response, involving increased heart rate, capillary dilation, hormonal effects, but is also subject to refinement by an act of will.³

Anchoresses are encouraged to think on their sins and weep for them; is there a more specific goal to this arousal in the feminine spirituality of the religious recluse? The anchoritic body is insulated from other people by personal intention and the walls of the anchorhold; it is dead to the world, while still actually alive; within the specialized context of the cell, symbolic death brings it to the threshold of the divine. On the practical side, the recluse cannot exclude the emotional dimension of life, for the sake of her own sanity: a life not engaged with feeling in any way is hardly life at all, inside or outside an anchorhold. Emotional engagement is written into all of the anchoritic texts: attention is drawn again and again to affective response. That the affect is bodily, not simply spiritual, is also recognized in medieval writing generally, along with the assumption that meditation on emotions directed by such readings, and the performance of devotions, open the walls of the body further and further into the dimension of the divine. Damien Bouquet traces the ways in which Augustine's concepts of 'reason' and 'will' alter in the course of the Christian Middle Ages as their natures are discussed again and again in relation to one another, and in relation to 'love': will is what matters the most of the faculties, because the others follow it. What is a 'good' will, if not a will which loves good? '... qu'est-ce qu'une volonté bonne sinon une volonté qui aime le bien?'⁴

Meditation which focused on concrete detail was part of the English religious life, from Anglo-Saxon poetry⁵ to Anselm's *Prayers and Meditations* and Aelred's advice to his sister.⁶ The culture of the anchorhold quite naturally refines it in a specialist context, and *be Wohunge of ure Lauerd* moves meditation into the realms of erotic affect through grief and loss as well as joy and desire. *Ancrene Wisse* advises its readers to manage the outer senses, directing them to turn those faculties inward, encouraging them towards attaining satisfying results: false worldly comforts will be revealed, along with the deceptions of the Devil and the torments of hell; the joys of heaven, the Virgin Mary,

and him ouer ham al þe blisseð ham alle; ant is hare alre crune ... 'Hit is a dearme healewi þat na mon ne cnaweð þat naueð hit ismecchet.' þis smech and tis cnawunge kimeð of gastelich sihðe. of gastelich herunge. of gastelich speche. þat ha schulen habben þe forgað for godes luue worldliche herunges. eorðliche spechen. fleschliche sihðen.

(and, over them all, him who gives joy to them all and is the crown of them all ... 'it is a secret balsam,' says St John the Evangelist in the Apocalypse; 'it is a secret balsam that no one knows who has not tasted it.' This tasting and this knowing come from spiritual sight, spiritual hearing, from spiritual speech, which those will have who forgo for God's love worldly hearing, earthly speech, fleshly sights.)

Sensation itself is always a reference point; however imaginatively disembodied, the frame of reference is sensual, because otherwise desire would not be compelling to the flesh in need of redemption.

The spiritual eroticism of the anchoritic life was a necessary function of the human body, and the readings associated with it are tactile, self- and other-directed, a form of consummation by words, or at least foreplay in a mystical courtship and lovemaking. Hundreds of women did not live out their lives in the anchorhold because a medieval patriarchy preferred women in prison;⁷ whatever a medieval patriarchy wanted, or conspired to do, or succeeded in perpetuating in terms of anti-feminist myth and practice, clearly medieval women had, as post-modern women do, ways to refashion these to their own advantage.

I will be discussing the anchoritic body as a corporeal metatext written by the anchoress, corporeal but not directed by social concerns like material wealth or happiness or reputation. In spite of having only an existing narrative language of social meaning, the anchoress removes herself as far as possible from it: she is not to think of herself as a family member, not to write letters; she goes through a symbolic burial service when she is enclosed in her cell, and is not to emerge. She is not to speak to anyone who comes to the window unless necessary – and it is here, at the physical boundary of the cell, the window to the outside, that the most important qualification occurs: what is necessary is left to her own judgement. She is not under the authority of a male spiritual adviser unless she decides to be. Whatever codes existed for behaviour in the cell, they are, like the Pirates' Code, 'more like guidelines than actual rules'.

Refashioning, subverting and simply ignoring anti-feminist discourse which permeates even the praises of women is often barely possible for women *outside an anchorhold*, even now. But, enclosed and uninterrupted

by this discourse, the recluse could speak ecstatically of the wealth of her divine lover, the beauty of his skin under his clothes, the loveliness of his face, having rejected these in worldly terms. It has always bothered me (and many other feminists) that the female recluse rejects marriage in the world only to be reclaimed by it in the cell; and yet now in working again with *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd* I am arriving slowly at a reading of the life of the anchoress in a different mode, more as I do with the medieval romance.

Sarah Kay's definition of romance as 'the principal form of secular entertainment in the middle ages'⁸ illustrates that it was less a genre than a way of telling stories, which accounts for its range and its permeation of narratives in general. A principal way of spending time alone, as well as in company, is the telling of stories pertaining to oneself, one's own history, situation and hopes: the Katherine Group, the Wooing Group, as well as the many exemplary narratives of *Ancrene Wisse*, are part of what I will call 'an anchoritic cycle' – like the Grail cycle – of the quest for the crown of sanctity in death, with the anchoress as its heroine. The lyrics of the Wooing Group are an indispensable part of this cycle, a means for the anchoress to incorporate her life into the right story, to engage again and again emotionally and intellectually on her own direction in the quest. Note that in *The Quest for the Holy Grail* it is usually a religious recluse who appears to unravel a dream or give some directions to the knight; it seems that the recluses, not the knights, are the experts in following one's way to the end.

The lyrics of the Wooing Group reinterpret the sexual life of the body as a mystical life, that of a real, female body living on the edge of a dangerous abyss otherwise conducive to madness. Solitary confinement is one of the worst tortures inflicted on the helpless, on the abject. Without the mirror of others to define who a person is, the mind can simply lose track of the self. But the anchoress who does not lose her mind and her health spends a solitary life in the work of redefining selfhood and otherness, of telling the story of this quest for meaning with her own female body. She must be able to use the social function, language, in a larger arena altogether. The language of the Wooing Group prayers trace out a devotional circuit in which the reader is reminded of who she is by the kind of story in which she lives, and in what strange dimension its language has meaning.

Thompson points out the similarities of phrasing with *Ancrene Wisse* which link *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd* also with *On Lofsong of ure Lefdi*, *On Ureison of ure Louerde*, the passions of the virgin martyrs and *Soul's Keeping*, concluding that the Wooing Group lyrics were likely influenced by *Ancrene Wisse* and by each other. 'These recurrent parallels undoubtedly

indicate the emergence of a native tradition with a somewhat conventionalized phraseology, much influenced by Latin writers and by the *Song of Songs*;⁹ it is striking that there are no verbal links to Anselm, Bernard or Hugh of St Victor, which reinforces the idea that these works are part of a new vernacular tradition. Likewise the Anglo-Norman literature shows parallels rather than sources.¹⁰ But to use conventional language is not to be merely conventional, except in the most superficial way. To use conventional language to mean something else entirely, something outside the usual linguistic realm of reference; to spend a lifetime doing it in solitary confinement; this discipline arose from the peculiar context of the solitary. Language use in this realm required special skills, developed over time, to provide and direct affective experience into learning.

The betrothal of the Holy Virgin to her God is a cliché – to everyone except herself. To redefine language entirely in her own terms, for her own use, to communicate with someone not present to anyone else, unseen, intangible, could be viewed as a severe form of mental illness. Even the most radical philosopher, deconstructionist or revolutionary relies on quite ordinary worldly means to live, move and have their being – but the anchoress *hardly did at all*. In *Ancrene Wisse* the image of the bird coming to the ground only to eat enough to live, turning round quickly, again and again, to ensure its own safety, is the anchoress seeing to her worldly needs;¹¹ at one extreme, this is a far cry from the philosopher with a cup of coffee or glass of port, writing or reading a book in a comfortable chair, and even at the other, the frantic academic pounding away at a keyboard to meet a deadline. One major difference, which makes all the difference here, is the situation of *the body in question*: is it engaged in a ceaselessly demanding and dangerous exercise, or is it soothed, comfortably forgotten, or simply a word-making machine for the intellect? Or is it fleeing its relentless predator, the Devil, in the imagined body of a deer, while waking, fasting, praying and meditating confined to a cell? Probably not, unless it is the body of an anchoress.

The role of suffering – human suffering in general, the suffering of Christ, but, in particular the suffering experienced by the anchoress – has focused much of our scholarly discussion. Here I consider the discomforts and pain of the anchoritic life, but also the positive counterbalance to suffering which could be provided by affective meditation – by reading, by spontaneous and unwritten *performances of Be Wohunge of ure Lauerd* and texts like it. The effects of time and suffering alone, without affective pleasure, not only degrade a human body, but ravage it. The anchoress chose her physical position outside the social world, something which for those in the

world looks like a kind of self-hatred, a punishment of the sinful body. But we know from *Ancrene Wisse* that any *actual* physical punishments were viewed by the author with disapproval; much better, he says, is a sweet and tender heart.¹² How is anyone to sweeten their soul in solitary confinement, even when confinement is willed?

Anchoritic abjection cannot have been experienced in the usual, social way, as being cast out. Her physical surroundings, however empty, must have provided her with the tools to rework almost every aspect of the experience, so that her suffering was positive. The 'sinful human body' was itself a site of pain because of its separation from the beloved even in the anchorhold, no further than the threshold of future fulfilment. Her activities there required her to work constantly on revising, through affective experiences, the language of passion that was meaningful outside her situation. *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd* testifies to this. Some of the terms of deconstruction are illuminating here: 'Deconstruction is not an enclosure in nothingness, but an openness to the other'¹³ and an attempt 'to discover the non-place or non-lieu which would be [that] "other" of philosophy'.¹⁴ As a philosophical stance, its relevance here is rooted in the idea of 'the impossible' as philosophical praxis, of performative waiting.¹⁵ Anchoritic abjection is thus an openness to a new meaning of the body.

Julia Kristeva's mystical approach to abjection seems, in this context, a plausible discourse of the anchorhold for us to consider:

I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and stead of what will be 'me'. Not at all an other with whom I identify and incorporate, but an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be. A possession previous to my advent: a being-there of the symbolic that a father might or might not embody. Significance is indeed inherent in the human body.¹⁶

The body of the anchoress is not abject because it has been expelled from society, from worldly life, or because it is inherently sinful, but because the anchoress *has willed it* to be abject as the starting-point of a life with the world at its back, a life on the edge of the divine. The anchorhold is a kind of nowhere, a 'non-lieu' in Derrida's terms, where a new philosophy of the human body is made.

Chantal Chawaf asks, 'Isn't it the goal of writing to articulate the body?'¹⁷ While Chawaf's question may be taken at face value, it is significant in our understanding of the place of *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd* in the 'anchoritic cycle' if we focus on her added qualification:

The word has its own organic life and to conserve that life is of the utmost importance. In order to reconnect the book with the body and with pleasure, we must

disintellectualize writing. The corporality of language stirs up our sensuality, wakes it up, pulls it away from indifferent inertia. Theories deprive us of whirlpools, sparkling and free, which should carry us naturally toward our full blossoming, our rebirth. For me the most important thing to work on is orality.¹⁸

The performative, oral dimensions of *Be Wohunge of ure Lauerd* and its associated lyrical prose works bring writing into the life of the body through intense affective response. The bad-marriage scenarios of *Hali Meiðhad* are designed to exploit the imaginations of celibate women, which will turn at times to the lost world of sex and children, of romantic love and the feminine secular dominion. Some positive balance in these categories is attained in the Wooing Group, both in the love-lyrics to Christ as Bridegroom and those to Mary as Lady. Both secular and celibate modes of narrative inform the lyrics, just as they do the medieval romance and hagiography. Separation from and reunion with the beloved, the loss of status and its recovery, are major themes in the story of the medieval self.

These narratives tell the story of the anchorhold, too: they define the cell and the person within it, the life lived, and the death, as they are recounted or lyricized, as they participate in the arguments, errors of judgement and triumphs of the anchoritic life. While each recluse must keep the world out of the cell as much as possible, avoiding the talkative soap salesman and ensuring that the wandering milk-cow does not require cross-country pursuit, the enclosed imagination must not be allowed to focus on dangerous temptations in such a way as to lose control over them. But it is clearly understood by the writers of anchoritic texts that the imagination of the recluse *must be active*. Though, of course, prayers such as those suggested in *Ancrene Wisse* will take up time every day, the recluse still has many years of minutes and hours which must be filled. Part of the work of the anchoress must be self-knowledge, and a great part of that knowledge is the refining of desire within the specialized fires of celibacy and seclusion. Desire must be experienced to be understood, and such lyrics fan its flames in order that both the desire and the anchoress's response to it can be objects of contemplation – or, rather, *bodily events* of contemplation. While the anchoress is not to lose control over temptation, she is actually encouraged in *Ancrene Wisse* to lose it in contemplative pleasure. During the elevation of the host, she is to pray to see God face to face in heaven, and then, after the kiss of peace,

forȝeoteð al þe world. þer beoð al ut of bodi þer isperclinde luue bicluppeð ower
leofmon þe in to ower breostes bur is iliht of heouene. ond haldeð him heteuete
aþet he habbe iȝettet ow al þet ȝe eauer easkið.

(forget all the world, be wholly out of your body, embrace in shining love your lover who has alighted into the bower of your heart from heaven, and hold him as tight as you can until he has granted all you ever ask.)¹⁹

She is 'God's chamber'²⁰ and has privileged inward sight of her own sins and the torments of hell, but also sees 'spiritually' the Virgin with her maidens, the saints, 'and, over them all, him who gives joy to them all and is the crown of them all, a sight which has a taste of secret balsam unknown to those who have never tasted it'.²¹

While it could be argued that mystical experience itself is purely *meta*-physical, it must equally be understood that *embodiment* of a special kind, an experience queered by articulation, is posited by the language of physical pleasure, the deconstructionist 'impossible experience'. It seems pointless to argue about this: it is, in whatever way, *experience*, and it is described as experience which integrates existence in the body with the divine.

The framework of *On Ureisun of ure Louerde* is set out in the invocation: Jesus is 'soð god. soð mon'.²² The divine and the human are fused, for the following experiences of pleasure, which include sweetness, healing, joy, light, softness, loveliness. These are expressed as both exclamation and appeal, before the argument of the meditation, on why Jesus is to be loved over all; the pleasure of the contemplation in what 'true God/true man' is defines the origin of desire. Argument comes second, once this ground of pleasure has been established. *On wel swuðe God Ureisun* and the *Þe Wohunge of ure Lauerd* begin the same way.

On Lofsong of ure Louerde and *On Lofsong of ure Lefdi* begin in the painful experience of grief and fear over the reader's sin. Like the approach to contemplation through pleasure, these seem designed to provoke, even inflame, bodily sensation of affect – here negative, but still the opening grounds of the argument. That is, bodily affect – emotional experience of pleasure and pain – is the gateway to contemplation, argument, and ultimately right attention.²³

The texts offer exercises to the solitary, an athletic flexing of affect which is to be constantly directed in the service of constructing her new world in the anchorhold, the new context of the body. Emotional strength must be acquired and maintained, redeveloped after periods of depression or other illness, for example, and rebuilt in new areas of the personality throughout life; the habit of direction of affect requires the rigorous discipline of the vigilant sparrow on the ground. The grand narrative of the love between the anchoress and her betrothed is focused on different dramatic situations, designed to fit her moods of joyous desire and closeness, of grief and separation, of unfulfilled longing and impatience.

De Wohunge of ure Lauerd is the fullest treatment of the narrative in the collection, beginning in outpourings of joy and tenderness, and, once these are established, reasoned arguments of Christ's superiority as a lover which return to the refrain of satisfaction,

A Iesu mi
swete iesu leue þat te luue of
þe beo al mi liking.²⁴

The reader begins with a series of stages created by verbalization – the pleasure of possessing the lover (*my dear, my darling, my lord, my saviour, my honey-drop, my balm*); pleasure in the contemplation of Jesus' beauty as lover, with practice imagining what the *worldly* qualities that cause desire are, then imagining beyond those, culminating in ecstatic outpourings of desire, and pleasure in that desire, then the first refrain. The next pleasure is in the imagining of the means to heaven as love of Jesus for himself alone ('for þe self luue þeseluen'), which includes

te eorðe & al þat
hit fulles world & al þat trin
wuneð. Heuene wið þe murh
ðes & ta unimete blisses

(the world and all that lives therein, heaven with its pleasures and its immeasurable joys, ll. 66–8),

and the refrain. There is pleasure in her lover's generosity, that she should sit on his right hand in heaven, then the refrain; in his wisdom, with an invitation to dig deep to find it ('Inwiþ þe mi leue lif is hord of alle wisdom hid' (Within you, my beloved life, is hidden the hoard of all wisdom, ll. 115–16), then the refrain.

Gently the reader is led into a focus on the life of Jesus and the Passion itself, identifying with his poverty, and how he suffered and died. These are expanded in detail in the following lines, gradually increasing the affective temperature through further possibilities for identifying with Christ's pilgrim state (as, for example, in the *Ancrene Wisse* Introduction the anchoresses are urged to say they are of the order of St James, should any-one ask), lack of rest, and finally

Ah atte laste
of þi lif hwen þu for me swa
rewliche hengedes on rode . ne

hafdes in al þis world hwer wiþ
 þat blisful blodi bodi þu mihtes
 hule & huide . & swa nu swete lef-
 mon poure þu þe self was . & te
 poure þu raðeste cheas . pouer-
 te þu luuedes . pouerte þu tah
 tes . & 3iuen þu haues echeli
 che þin endelese blisse . til alle
 þat clenli for þi luue mesaise &
 pouerte wilfulliche þolien.²⁵

(Ah, at the end of your life you for me so piteously hung on the cross, you had nothing in all the world to cover and hide your blissful bloody body, and so sweet lover you yourself were poor and you preferred to be poor: poverty you loved, poverty you taught and you have given forever your endless joy, until all who live purely for your love willingly suffer hardship and poverty.²⁶)

The anchoress's actual participation in the narrative is reached here. The benefits of her life are laid out as anti-types of how Jesus lived them in the same way: he had poverty with shame, not honour; he was wrongfully accused, judged by 'hel/le dogges' (ll. 138–9), hanged between two thieves, and tortured, not safely enclosed in the cell. This is the apex of the Passion narrative, the affective centre of both grief and joy for the anchoress: that her lover suffered, and that he did so for her.

The text demands visualization and possibly even performance here.

Bute hwat tunge mai
 hit telle. hwat heorte mai
 hit þenche²⁷

is followed by detailed placement of the self within the passion narrated at times in the present tense, and punctuated by participatory exclamations:

A hwat schal
 I nu don? Nu min herte mai to
 breke . min ehe flowen a o wa
 ter . A nu is mi lefmon demd for
 to deien . (ll. 488–92)

(Oh, what must I do now? Now my heart is going to break, my eyes flood over with water. Oh, now my lover is sentenced to death.²⁸)

As Christ is being led to Calvary, carrying his cross, the participant exclaims

A lefmon hu
 mon folhes te . þin frend sarili-
 che wiþ reming & sorhe. (ll. 498–500)

(Oh, love, how they follow you, your friends grieving, with pain and sorrow).²⁹

Every moment of scourging, stretching out and nailing, bleeding and gall is here, with an immediacy of suffering which demands the anchoress experience it, affectively if no other way. The *Ancrene Wisse* author comments on self-imposed pain:

Nest lich nan ne gurde hire wið na cunne gurdles; bute þurh schriftes leaue. ne beore nan im ne here. ne ilespiles felles. ne ne beate hire þer wið; ne wið scourge ileadet. wið holin ne wið breres. ne biblodgi hire seolf wiðute schriftes leaue. nohwer ne binetli hire. ne ne beate biuoren . ne na keoruunge ne keorue ... Sum wummon inohreade wereð þe brech of here wel icnottet. þe streapeles dun to þe vet ilact ful feaste. ah eauver is best þe swete ond te swote heorte.³⁰

(Let no-one belt herself with any kind of belt next to the body, except with her confessor's leave, nor wear any iron or hair, or hedgehog skins; let her not beat herself with them, nor with a leaded scourge, with holly or briars, nor draw blood from herself without her confessor's leave; let her not sting herself with nettles anywhere, nor beat herself in front, nor cut herself ... A woman will sometimes wear breeches of haircloth very firmly knotted, the legs very tightly laced down to the feet. But always a sweet and tender heart is best.³¹)

That is, while the anchoress may sometimes engage in these exercises, her usual physical discomfort is at a low level though constant, and her greatest suffering is affective: the sense of her sin as a cause of Christ's agony, to which he submits through love for her. And this is also the source of pleasure, something which keeps her heart sweet and tender: that her lover believes her worthy of him.

On this sweeter side in *Þe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, the remedy for suffering through Christ's passion is renewed pleasure: the prayer-refrain,

A Iesu mi
 swete iesu leue þat te luue of
 þe beo al mi liking³²

(Ah Jesus, sweet Jesus, grant that love of you be all my pleasure³³),

brings all sections of the meditation back to the sensation of sweetness. Pleasure as closure makes sense of pain here, as it does later to Julian when she finds in the course of her apparent dying that she would rather gaze at Jesus on the Cross than look up to heaven to God, because her understand-

ing of that suffering as she gazes is heaven while she lives.³⁴ Performative reading over the course of a lifetime, and meditation on insights gained through exploration of all the possible pains and pleasures of choosing Christ as a lover, draw the anchoritic participant into that world of impossible being and discourse which is her higher life. While the intellectual debates and redefinitions of the Cistercians laid the ground for the importance of affect, which we see in Aelred's *De Institutione Inclusarum*, its lived experience in the anchorhold appears to have provided the rewards.

Notes

- ¹ Benedicta Ward, 'Inward feeling and deep thinking': the Prayers and Meditations of St Anselm revisited', *Anselm Studies*, 1 (1983), 177.
- ² *De Wohunge of ure Lauerde*, EETS os 241, ed. W. Meredith Thompson (London: Oxford University Press, 1958) p. xxx.
- ³ Damien Boquet, *L'ordre de l'affect au moyen âge: autour de l'anthropologie affective d'Aelred de Rievaulx* (CRAHM, 2005), pp. 218–19; for discussion of Augustine, will and affect see the entire chapter, 'La conversion chrétienne de l'affect'. Antonio Damasio outlines the neurological relationships between the faculties in *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain* (New York: Avon Books, 1994).
- ⁴ '... [Q]u'est-ce qu'une volonté bonne sinon une volonté qui aime le bien?', Boquet, p. 90.
- ⁵ Aelred of Rievaulx, *De Institutione Inclusarum*, *Two English Versions*, EETS os 287, eds John Ayto and Alexandra Barrett (London: Oxford University Press, 1984).
- ⁶ *Ancrone Wisse*, edited from MS Corpus Christi College Cambridge 402, EETS os 240, ed. J. R. R. Tolkien (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 50, ll. 25–8; translation Savage and Watson, p. 83.
- ⁷ Anne Savage, 'The place of Old English poetry in the English meditative tradition', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Aldershot: D. S. Brewer, 1987).
- ⁸ See, for example, the remark an elderly cleric makes to Margery Kempe: 'I wold þu wer cloyd in an hows of ston, þat þer schuld no man speke wiþ þe.' *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Barry Windeatt (New York: Penguin, 2000), ll. 870–1.
- ⁹ Sarah Kay, *Courtly Contradictions: The Emergence of the Literary Object in the Twelfth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 301.
- ¹⁰ Thompson, p. xix.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. xix–xx.
- ¹² 'Those birds fly well who have little flesh and many feathers, as the pelican has. The ostrich, on account of its heavy flesh, and other birds like it, try to look as if they are flying and beat their wings; but their feet are constantly dragged to the earth. It is just the same with the fleshly anchoress, who lives in fleshly desires and

follows her ease. The heaviness of her flesh and fleshly vices deprive her of her flight.' Savage and Watson, p. 97.

¹³ *Eauer is best þe swete ond te swote heorte. * *Ancrene Wisse*, p. 214, l. 17.

¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Psyche: Invention of the Other*, in *Reading de Man*, eds L. Waters and W. Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 112. Derrida writes: 'I would say that deconstruction loses nothing from admitting that it is impossible; also that those who would rush to delight in that admission lose nothing from having to wait. For a deconstructive operation *possibility* would rather be a danger, the danger of becoming an available set of rule-governed procedures, methods, accessible practices. The interest of deconstruction, of such force and desire as it may have, is a certain experience of the impossible' (p. 36). He continues: 'deconstruction is inventive or it is nothing at all; it does not settle for methodological procedures, it opens up a passageway, it marches ahead and marks a trail; its writing is not only performative, it produces rules – other conventions – for new performativities and never installs itself in the theoretical assurance of a simple opposition between performative and constative. Its *process* involves an affirmation, this latter being linked to the coming [*venir*] in event, advent, invention' (p. 337).

¹⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 10.

¹⁸ Chantal Chawaf, 'Creations', in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Marks (New York: Pantheon, 1987), p. 177.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

²⁰ *Ancrene Wisse*, p. 21, ll. 18–23, Savage and Watson, p. 59.

²¹ Savage and Watson, pp. 82–3; see also p. 86, in which the kisses of his mouth are 'a sweetness and a delight of the heart so immeasurably sweet that every taste of the world is bitter compared with it'.

²² *On Ureisun of ure Louerde*, l. 1.

²³ Similar to and perhaps building upon the spirituality of these earlier anchoritic works, Julian of Norwich's experiences in the body led to contemplation and then writing something akin to that new philosophy of the body Derrida mentions, p. 170 above.

²⁴ *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, ll. 55–7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, ll. 345–57.

²⁶ Savage and Watson, pp. 252–3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

²⁸ *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, ll. 458–60.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, ll. 488–91.

³⁰ *Ancrene Wisse*, p. 214, ll. 2–17.

³¹ Savage and Watson, p. 202.

³² *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, ll. 55–7.

³³ Savage and Watson, p. 248.

³⁴ Julian of Norwich, *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. Gorgia Ronan Crampton (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS, 1994), XIX, p. 63; Savage and Watson, p. 255.

What Kind of Writing is *A Talkyng of þe Love of God?*

MICHAEL G. SARGENT

It is of the nature of taxonomy to be controversial. For example, although musicologists are in general agreement on the definition of a classical symphony, it can be debated for ever just which form of eighteenth-century symphonic suite was its nearest progenitor. Although evolutionary biologists agree that the birds descended from some dinosaur-like form of Mesozoic reptile, they will debate for ever whether, tracing that descent back from bird to egg to bird to egg, it will become apparent that birds are members of the class of *dinosauridae*. This is as it should be: for a taxonomy is first and foremost a conceptual tool, a way of mentally mapping relationship and difference; it is not itself the relationship or the difference. The answer lies as much in the humanly constructed definition of ‘classical symphony’ or ‘dinosaur’ as in the things themselves – and there is a further difference between whether the subject of the taxonomy is itself a human construct, like ‘classical symphony’, or a thing existing with or without human knowledge of it, like a dinosaur.

It is in this spirit that I would like to begin here by engaging with Nicholas Watson’s statement, in his article on ‘The Middle English mystics’ in David Wallace’s *Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, that ‘both the canon of “Middle English mystics” and the term “mysticism” itself have largely outlived their usefulness to scholars.’¹ Watson’s observation depends, in part, on his view of the modern scholarship on medieval English mystical writing as largely the result of a nostalgic reconstruction of Anglo-Catholicism on the part of such writers as Dom David Knowles, a Benedictine monk (although released from his obedience and residence in

Downside Abbey to live as a Professor in Cambridge), Fr James Walsh, a Jesuit priest and editor of *The Way*, a journal of spirituality, and Fr Edmund Colledge, who was raised a Baptist in Liverpool, but converted to Roman Catholicism and was ordained a priest and an Augustinian friar in Rome. Citing such men as his primary examples, Watson remarks that 'it has meant that the academic *study* of mystical theology has never been definitively detached from its *practice*'.

Watson's narrative is not entirely true: I knew Frs Colledge and Walsh personally, and although both were certainly devout, neither could have been called a 'practising mystic' – and I suspect that the same was true of Dom Knowles. We must also note that the study of medieval English mystical writings was furthered at least as much by the work of Evelyn Underhill, an Anglican lay spiritual adviser (and probably the only actual mystic in the present list), of Hope Emily Allen, an American of private beliefs, whose parents had belonged to the nineteenth-century perfectionist community at Oneida, New York, and of Valerie Lagorio, an American lapsed Catholic English professor of whose liberality of thought and lifestyle Fr Colledge certainly never approved. My point here is that there is no single agenda underlying the modern study of the medieval English mystics that can be safely projected back on to the former age as its *ex post facto* unifying principle.

On the other hand, I will confess that I am as uncomfortable as Watson is with the word 'mystical', which is unfortunately connected in the modern consciousness with the weird and the esoteric in much the same way that the word 'medieval' is connected with cruelty and stupidity. I prefer to speak of 'contemplative and devotional literature'. My own observation of the history of the study of medieval writings of this kind is that in most cases they were ignored during the period, until the mid-nineteenth century, that anti-Catholicism was the norm in academe, as in other forms of public life. Catholic and Protestant scholars agreed in supporting the narrative that reformed Christianity sprang fully formed from the brow of Martin Luther, with no (or few) embarrassing medieval precursors. Watson is certainly right in noting that one important source of twentieth-century English scholarship on medieval mystical literature was to be found in the positivist historicism of late nineteenth-century continental European scholarship in ecclesiastical history and religious literature – French primarily, but also German, Dutch and Italian. Nationalism entered this discourse in the late nineteenth century, and secularism in the early twentieth, to be resolved in various ways in the different countries of Europe, including Britain.

The conflict between the study of the religious life of the Middle Ages and secular academic work in England in the early twentieth century is tellingly portrayed in an anecdote told by Owen Chadwick:

When I was reading history as an undergraduate at the university, some friends, also reading history, asked what area of history I intended to make my specialty; and when I replied *Ecclesiastical History*, one of them said, 'I would have thought that would have been more ecclesiastical than historical'.²

The American experience is parallel: doctoral dissertations editing and studying the literature of vernacular spirituality in medieval England – including mystical and non-mystical authors – tended to be written by young priests and nuns working at Duquesne, Georgetown, Fordham and the Catholic University of America. This shifted for a time in the middle part of the century under the influence of the neo-Aristotelianism, neo-Scholasticism and neo-Augustinianism of the University of Chicago, Etienne Gilson, C. S. Lewis, and D. W. Robertson, but soon shifted back again. Another anecdote: Valerie Lagorio was fond of describing an editorial meeting of *Speculum* where various books were being divided up for review. At the end of the meeting, she said, the editor disdainfully slid a single volume across the table to her with the words, 'Here's another mystical one for you, Valerie.' 'I'll take it!' she responded proudly.

The position of the study of contemplative and devotional literature in contemporary American academe, however, is largely the result of two quite different impulses: feminism (particularly religious feminism) and Lollardy. Although their degree of identification with, or reactions to, social and political formulations of feminism that developed during their careers vary greatly, it is to three women scholars, at least as much as to Colledge and Walsh, that we owe the current prominence of the study of Julian of Norwich among the writers of late medieval English vernacular spirituality: Sr Anna Maria Reynolds, the Irish nun (Sisters of the Cross and Passion) and educator who produced the first critical editions in theses presented to the University of Leeds in 1947 and 1956; Sr Ritamary Bradley, a nun originally of the Sisters of the Humility of Mary of Ottumwa, Iowa, one of the founders of the Sister Formation Conference in 1954, hounded out of her order by ecclesiastical authority, eventually transferring to the Sisters for Christian Community; and Professor Marion Glasscoe, the founder of the University of Exeter's series of conferences and volumes on 'The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England'.³ Three of the great milestones of contemporary critical work on Margery Kempe are studies by Karma Lochrie, Sarah Beckwith and Lynne Staley.⁴ On the other hand, the fact that

Nicholas Love has been restored to something resembling his former prominence among men contemplative and devotional writers in later medieval England is due largely to the fact that contemporary scholars of fifteenth-century Lollardy have dealt with him (appropriately) as one of the great opponents of Wycliffism.⁵

Further, it must also be noted that although it is quite useful to bring mystical writings back into consideration as one of a variety of subgenres of the literature of vernacular spirituality, Watson's category of 'vernacular theology' is theoretically just as problematic as that of 'Middle English mysticism'. Both suffer from the same taxonomic problem: exclusion of works that ought to be included, and inclusion of works that might well be excluded. In the article on 'Censorship and cultural change' that is the companion piece to his chapter in the *Cambridge History*, Watson usefully places the history of the literature of late medieval English vernacular spirituality in the context of the academic debate in Oxford over the appropriateness of the vernacular as a medium for theological discourse – although the focus of the debate was on scriptural translation, and not on the possibility of writing *Summae Theologicae* or commentaries on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard in English.⁶ For in the context of late medieval academe, it would have been works of that nature that would properly have constituted 'Theology'. What Watson has done is to shift the meaning of 'Theology' to mean primarily those works on the relationship of humankind to God that strike the modern critic as being creative or innovative. The roster of authors and works that he considers central to this field can be made up from the list of those about which he has himself written: Richard Rolle, Julian of Norwich, Marguerite Porete, Langland, the *Pearl*-poet and Nicholas Love. This criterion of inclusion in the field of 'Theology', unfortunately, leaves out the vast bulk of medieval vernacular spirituality – to say nothing of Latin.

Although Watson's focus on the issue of vernacularity is highly important, in my own work I would make two alterations to his taxonomy: I would rather speak of 'vernacular spirituality' (as I have been doing here) *inclusively*, but capable of division into subcategories such as 'mystical writings', 'sermons', 'religious drama', or 'saints' lives'; and I would look at taxonomy not as a pie-chart of fields defined inward from their borders, but radially, as a set of often overlapping moment-forces, each defined outward from one basic direction. In such a taxonomy, I think that it is still worth while to speak of a field of 'contemplative writings' that share the characteristic that they are all in some way 'about' the direct experience of God in this life – a field that shades off, however, in various directions: into

pastoral writings, writings on the spiritual advisement of women, vision literature, sermons, the drama, devotions to the life and Passion of Christ or to the saints, and so on. But we may note that the discursive field of 'contemplative writings' was as visible to the reading and writing communities that copied works of this type into manuscripts together as they are to us.

Within the genre of contemplative writings, I would like here to distinguish a variety of subgenres that have become prominent at different times, among different groups of writers, which differ from one another in the mode of meditation lying at the core of each. The first of these is the 'monastic', ruminative mode that lay at the basis of the monastic tradition of reading, prayer and meditation on the Scriptures.⁷ The second is the 'Franciscan', imaginative mode that lies in the subject's making her/himself, in his or her mind's eye, present at the events of the life of Christ, Mary or the saints. Although this mode of meditation arose before the Franciscan Order existed, and was practised by others as well, I think that it is characteristic enough of early Franciscan meditative literature that this is not an appropriate name. I would add a further characteristic to the definition of writings in this mode: that of *direction*. I think that it is important to note of such primary works of this subgenre as the *Stimulus Amoris* and the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* that they were written by men, directing women to direct their gaze on particular aspects of the scenes with which they provided them.⁸

It is in this that the 'Franciscan' genre of writings differs from the 'Visionary' literature that is characteristic of the next mode that I would distinguish. In the literature of contemplative visions – a genre dominated by women writers – the starting-point is often Franciscan-style prayerful meditation on the events of the lives of Christ and Mary, but at some point the male spiritual director's control of the woman visionary, and the woman subject's control of her imagination, cease, and – whether by supernatural means or psychological I am myself not competent to say – the vision itself takes place. In Middle English, the primary texts of this genre would be the *Revelations* of Julian of Norwich, the various versions of the *Revelations* of Brigit of Sweden and the *Dialogo* of Catherine of Siena, Mechtilde of Hackeborn's *Booke of Gostlye Grace*, the *Revelations* of Margaret of Hungary and *The Book of Margery Kempe*. In these works, the male adviser winds up reclaiming his position of authority only in the secondary role of authorizing witness or confessor – which, for the purposes of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, of course, is entirely sufficient. In some of the vision literature named here, the position of the authorizing male is problematic, hovering between the role of simple amanuensis and the claim to

some kind of co-authorship; in others, like the lives of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, Christina Mirabilis and Marie d'Oignies, the roles of female visionary and male writer/authorizer are more obviously delineated, although nonetheless problematic.

Other genres of contemplative literature might include works of spiritual direction, like the *Specula* of Aelred of Rievaulx and Edmund of Abingdon, *Ancrene Wisse* and Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*, or didactic works like those of the *Cloud* corpus or Marguerite Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls*. Another genre might best be described as *mystagogic* writings, those attempting to produce in the reader an experience similar to that of the writer – I am thinking here particularly of Rolle's *Melos Amoris*. It is in this subgenre that I would place *A Talkyng of þe Loue of God*, as an example of what I will here call the 'Isidorian' mode of contemplative writing.

The term 'Isidorian' itself derives from a passage in the *Parisiana Poetria* of John of Garland in which he describes the four 'curial' styles of prose writing, each named after its great master or exponent:⁹ Gregorian, Ciceronian or academic, Hilarian and Isidorian. From the examples that accompany the descriptions, it is possible to identify the various styles. As Traugott Lawlor observes in his edition of the *Parisiana Poetria*, the Gregorian style is 'the orthodox Roman *cursus*'. 'In the Ciceronian style', John continues, 'attention is paid not to the rhythm of feet but to rhetorical figures of words ... The Hilarian style is a succession of two spondees, then a half-spondee, that is, one syllable, then a dactyl.' The fourth style is described as follows:

In the Isidorian style, which Augustine employs in the book of the *Soliloquies*, clauses with similar endings are set apart by leonines [i.e. rhyming endings] and consonance; and the clauses seem to be equal in syllables, though in fact they may not be. This style has great power to stir piety or amusement.¹⁰

The example that John provides shows how the Isidorian style can be used for ridicule (I have taken the liberty of setting the prose text up *per cola et commata* so as to reflect the pattern of parallelism):

Pre pudore genus humanum obstupeat,
de communi dampno quilibet abhorreat,
admirentur serui,
stupescant liberi,
dum uocantur
ad cathedram elingues pueri,
conformantur
magistris leues discipuli,

dum causa studii
 fauor est populi.
 Prius legunt
 quam sillabitent;
 prius uolant
 quam humi curcitant;
 antequam sciant
 partes connectere,
 versus iactant
 miros componere.

(Let the human race be struck dumb with shame, / let every man shudder at the general blame, / let slaves be shocked, / let freemen be stupefied / when they are called / – stammering boys – to the professorial chair; / are ranked / – lightweight scholars – as masters; / when the cause of scholarship / is the plaything of the people. / They read lectures / before they can count syllables; / they fly / before they can skitter along the ground; / before they can / construct a sentence / they dare to write / wondrous poems [my translation].¹¹)

But as John notes, the repetitive pattern of parallel clauses can equally be used for introspective meditation, as in this example from St Augustine's *Soliloquia*, the style of which was discussed by Heinrich Stirnimann in a paper written in 1984, the presentation of which I copy here:¹²

Deus, universitatis conditor, praesta mihi
 primum, ut bene te rogem,
 deinde, ut me agam dignum, quem exaudias,
 postremo, ut liberes.
 Deus, per quem omnia
 quae per se non essent,
 tendunt ad esse;
 Deus, qui ne id quidem,
 quod se invicem perimit,
 perire permittis;
 Deus, qui de nihilo mundum istum creasti,
 quem omnium oculi sentiunt pulcherrimum;
 Deus, qui malum non facis,
 et facis esse, ne pessimum fiat;
 Deus, qui paucis ad id, quod vere est, refugientibus
 ostendis malum nihil esse;
 Deus, per quem universitas
 etiam cum sinistra parte perfecta est;
 Deus, a quo dissonantia
 usque in extremum nulla est,
 cum deteriora melioribus concinunt;

Deus, quem amat omne,
 quod potest amare,
 sive sciens,
 sive nesciens;
 Deus, in quo sunt omnia,
 cui tamen universae creaturae
 nec turpitudine turpis est,
 nec malitia nocet,
 nec error errat;
 Deus, qui nisi mundos
 verum scire noluisti;
 Deus, pater veritatis,
 pater sapientiae,
 pater verae summaeque vitae,
 pater beatitudinis,
 pater boni
 et pulchri,
 pater intelligibilis lucis,
 pater evigilationis
 atque illuminationis nostrae,
 pater pignoris, quo admonemur redire ad te:
 te invoco.

(God, creator of the universe, be with me / first, that I may ask you well / next,
 that I make myself worthy, whom you hear, / finally, that you free me. / God,
 through whom all things / that of themselves are not / come into being; / God,
 who do not [permit] even that / which kills itself / [permit] to die; / God, who cre-
 ated this world from nothing / that the eyes of all see is beautiful; / God, who did
 not make evil, / and make to be / lest the worst be; / God, who [show] to the few
 who fly to that which is true / [show] that evil is nothing; / God, through whom
 the universe / is perfect, even on the wrong side; / God, by whom dissonance /
 even in the end is nothing, / when the worse harmonize with the better; / God,
 whom everything loves / that can love, whether knowing / whether unknowing; /
 God, in whom are all things, / to whom every creature's / filth is not filthy, / nor
 ills harm, / nor error errs; / God, who [wish] by none but the pure / [wish] to be
 known; / God, father of truth, / father of wisdom, / father of the truest and highest
 life, / father of blessedness, / father of the good / and the beautiful, / father of the
 intelligible light, / father of [our] awakening / and [our] enlightenment, / father of
 the pledge, by which we are admonished to return to you: / I pray to you.)

The parallelism of the clauses here is more complex than in John's exam-
 ple, including alliteration as well as end-rhyme and repetition: the whole is
 unified by the repetition of the construction 'Deus' + relative pronoun; the
 passage also makes constant use of both leonine (i.e. 'true') rhyme, and of

the figure *similiter cadens* at the ends of the clauses (i.e. ending with words or phrases in the same grammatical case, not necessarily rhyming, such as feminine singular genitive '-is' and '-ae').¹³ This style, which Stirnimann describes (with no reference to later dictaminal formulations) as particularly apt to the reflective moral soliloquy, is found elsewhere in St Augustine's works, of course, and particularly in passages of the *Confessions*.

The Isidorian style takes its name, as Lawlor points out, not from his famous *Etymologiae*, but from the devotional *Synonyma*, the 'Lamentation of a sinner soul'.¹⁴ The opening section of this work follows: note here not merely the syntactic parallelism of the clauses and their resultant tendency to rhyme, or at least metrical uniformity, but also the use of alliteration, as for example that in 'a-' in the first clauses. Isadore also employs variation of gender in the first three clauses ('anima mea', 'spiritus meus', 'cor meum'), repetition of prefixes in the series 'circumdatus', 'circumseptus', 'circumclusus' and 'obsitus', 'opertus', 'oppressus', and chiasmus in the phrases 'non reperio ... tanti mali' / 'tanti doloris non invenio' and 'infelicitas mea' / 'mea calamitas'.

Anima mea in angustiis est,
 spiritus meus aestuat,
 cor meum fluctuat,
 angustia animi possidet me.
 Angustia animi affligit me,
 circumdatus sum omnibus malis
 circumseptus aerumnis,
 circumclusus adversis,
 obsitus miseriis,
 opertus infelicitate,
 oppressus angustiis,
 non reperio uspiam tanti mali perfugium,
 tanti doloris non invenio argumentum,
 evadendae calamitatis iudicia non comprehendo,
 minuendi funeris vestigia non invenio,
 ubique me infelicitas mea persequitur,
 domi forisque mea calamitas me non deserit.

(My soul is troubled, / my spirit rages, / my heart wavers, / trouble of soul possesses me. / Trouble of soul afflicts me, / encircled all around by evils, / hedged in all around by trials, / closed in all around by adversaries, / besieged with miseries, / acquainted with grief, / oppressed by troubles, / I can find no refuge from so great evil, / I can discover no salvation from so great sorrow, / I know no counsel for avoiding this calamity, / I find no path to the lessening of this destruction, /

my unhappiness follows me everywhere, / my calamity does not desert me at home or outdoors.)

It is this more elaborately repetitive style of writing, particularly under the influence of St Anselm of Canterbury, that becomes the standard form for late medieval contemplative writing in the Isidorian mode. The content of the meditation, we may observe, may vary: as Stirnimann points out, its use in Augustine's *Soliloquia*, as in Isidore's *Synonyma*, is introspective; it remains so in some of the meditations of Anselm (particularly in that 'Ad Concitandum Timorem' and the 'Deploratio Virginitatis Male Amissae'), although in Anselm and the tradition following him, the content might equally be Christocentric, or the meditation might be addressed to the persons of the Trinity or the apostles and saints. It is the repetitive nature of the written form of this type of meditation, and not its content, that is its determining characteristic.

Thomas Bestul has recently delineated the line of influence in England from the devotional writings by (or attributed to) St Anselm to the age of Richard Rolle,¹⁵ noting, as R. W. Southern does, the innovation in Anselm's directions to the readers of his meditations and prayers (quoting here from the *locus classicus*, Anselm's prefatory letter addressing a collection of his prayers to the Countess Matilda of Tuscany):

Because the enclosed meditations and prayers are written to excite the reader's mind to the love of fear of God, or to self-examination, they are not to be read in agitation but in quiet, not quickly but slowly, with a grave and intent meditation. Nor does the reader need to worry about reading any of them all the way through; but as much as he feels, by the grace of God, the disposition to prayer arise within himself, or as much as it pleases him.¹⁶

This manner of reading is specifically appropriate to the Isidorian mode of meditation that Anselm enjoins, and the style of meditational writing that he employs. Comparing the opening of Anselm's second meditation with the foregoing passage from Isidore, we may note that the characteristic forms of rhyme and repetition are again predominant:¹⁷

Anima mea,
 anima aerumnosa,
 anima, inquam, misera
 miseri homunculi,
 excute torporem tuum
 et discute peccatum tuum
 et concute mentem tuam.

Reduc ad cor enorme delictum et
 perduc de corde immanem rugitum.
 Intende, infelix,
 intende sceleris tui horrorem et
 protende horrificum terrorem
 et terrificum dolorem.
 Tu, inquam,
 quae quondam candidata caelesti lavacro,
 dotata spiritu sancto,
 in Christiana professione iurata,
 virgo fuisti, Christo desponsata.

(O my soul, / troubled soul, / wretched soul, I say, / of a wretched little man, / cast off your torpor, / and cast out your sin, / and arouse your mind. / Lead back to your soul great delight and / lead out from your soul an immense wail. / Look, unhappy one, / look at the horror of your sin and / draw out this horrible terror / and terrible sadness. / You, I say, / who once, washed clean in the heavenly font, / consecrated to the Holy Spirit, / vowed to the Christian profession / were a virgin, espoused to Christ.)

Note here the variant forms of repetition in phrases like ‘anima ... misera miseri homunculi’, in related verb forms like ‘excute’, ‘discute’ and ‘concute’, ‘reduc’ and ‘perduc’, ‘intende’ and ‘protende’, the alliteration in ‘a-’ shifting to ‘m-’ in the opening lines, the repetition of the prefix ‘in-’ in ‘Intende, infelix, intende’, the ‘staircase’ repetition of ‘horrorem ... horrificum terrorem ... terrificum dolorem’, and the multiple patterns of rhyme and *similiter cadens* in ‘candidata ... dotata ... iurata ... desponsata’, ‘lavacro ... spiritu sancto ... virgo ... Christo’ and the *chiasmus* of root-word repetition (‘Christiana’/‘Christo’) opposed to rhyme and *similiter cadens* in the final two lines, ‘in Christiana professione iurata, / virgo fuisti, Christo desponsata.’

A century ago, William Vollhardt drew attention to the dependence of the works of the Wooing Group upon the writings of Anselm of Canterbury. This dependence is usually one of similar theme, tone or style, however, and seldom demonstrably of literal borrowing or translation. As Sr Salvina Westra pointed out in her edition of the *Talkyng of þe Love of God*, ‘It is not that St. Anselm’s meditations are merely translated, but the medieval religious appear to have imbibed his work to such a degree as to have the images and phrases from it always at the back of their minds.’¹⁸ In fact, a large part of the apparent dependence of these works on the meditations and prayers of Anselm and his Latin congeners and followers is that the later vernacular writings, like their Latin predecessors, are written in the Isadorian mode.

Only one piece of the Wooing Group is demonstrably a translation of an existing Latin exemplar: the *Lofsong of Ure Lefdi* freely translates the *Oratio ad Sanctam Mariam* of Marbod of Rennes. The style of the Wooing Group has, however, as is unfortunately too common in Middle English devotional literature, been referred to earlier vernacular, rather than Latin models: as W. Meredith Thompson remarks in the introduction to his edition, ‘The whole “Wooing Group” belongs to the tradition of rhythmic, alliterative prose which is found in the “Katherine Group” and derives its patterns ultimately from the late Old English prose of such works as Ælfric’s *Lives* and Wlufstan’s homilies.’¹⁹ This passage, in which Thompson chooses to illustrate the character of this rhythmic, alliterative prose, in fact demonstrates its dependence on an Isidorian model. Note here the parallelism of the “‘mi” + complement’ phrases, the alliteration of ‘druð’, ‘derling’ and ‘drihtin’, ‘healend’, ‘hunter’ and ‘haliwei’, the parallelism of the ‘hwa’, ‘hwat’, ‘hwa’ questions at the end, and the repetition of the phrase ‘munegunge of þe’ in the ‘Swetter is ...’ clause (itself a reminiscence of the words of the Song of Songs) and the second of the questions. The typographical presentation of this passage is Thompson’s part of a demonstration that these texts are to be treated as rhythmical prose, and not verse:

Iesu swete iesu . mi druð . mi der-
 ling . mi drihtin . mi healend
 mi hunter . mi haliwei . Swet
 ter is munegunge of þe þen
 mildeu o muðe . Hwa ne mei
 luue þi luueli leor? Hwat her
 te is swa hard þat ne mei to mel
 te iþe munegunge of þe? Ah
 hwa ne mei luue þe luueli-
 che iesu?²⁰

(Jesus sweet Jesus my dear my darling my Lord my Saviour my honey-drop my balm. Sweeter is the memory of you than honey in the mouth. Who cannot love your lovely face? What heart is so hard that it cannot melt in the memory of you? Ah, who cannot love you, lovely Jesus?²¹)

A Talkyng of þe Love of God is a late fourteenth-century meditation based in large part upon two of the writings of the twelfth-century Wooing Group: its opening section derives from the *Wel swiðe God Ureisun of God Almihti*; this is followed by a middle section whose ancestor (if there is one) is unknown; the final section derives largely from the *Wohunge*, but

with the insertion of the prayer to Our Lady with which the *Ureisun* ends, and an apparently independent final section. Parts of the independent sections of the *Talkyng* appear, as Westra noted, to echo Anselm's meditations, as in the two following passages, the first from Anselm's *Meditatio III*, the second from the *Talkyng*:²²

Tu enim,
tu misera anima mea,
 meretrix obstinata,
 fornicatrix impudens,
tu prior amatori
 et creatori
tu Deo repudium obstulisti,
et ad insidiatorem
 et perditorem tuum
 daemonem
te sponte contulisti.

(For you, / you my wretched soul, / obstinate whore, / impudent slut, / you first [proffered refusal] to your lover / and your creator, / to God you [proffered refusal], / and to your seducer / and your betrayer / the devil / you offered yourself willingly.)

...

Dees is he . þat mor bey3 . in wille & in werk . to þe deueles tolling . þen to godes drawing . And more haþ rewarde to þe deueles gyle; þen to godes benfe3 . þat bo3t him on on Rode . And hadde more liking . in þe Malice of þe deuel . þen he hadde delyt; in Godes goodnesse And ches muchel rapere . to be þe deueles cundle; þen wiþ endeles lyf . godes child of heuene.²³

Again, we may note in both the pattern of short, parallel clauses with occasional end-rhyme, apparently (although not necessarily) of the same length, that John of Garland had described as Isidorian. In the passage from the *Talkyng*, note particularly the parallelism of the clauses beginning 'mor bey3', 'more haþ rewarde', 'hadde more liking' and 'ches muchel rapere'; or the balance of 'þe deuels tolling' and 'godes drawyng', 'þe deueles gyle' and 'godes benfe3', 'þe Malice of þe deuel' and 'Godes goodnesse', 'þe deuels cundle' and 'godes child'. This particular passage does not often rhyme, although other sections of the *Talkyng* fall into repetitive, syntactically uniform (*similiter cadentes*) rhyming clauses that recall the description in the opening section of the work:

Dis tretys. Is a talkyng of þe loue of God. And is mad for to sturen. hem þat hit reden; to louen him þe more. And to fynde lykyng. and tast in his loue. Hit falleþ

for to reden hit. esyliche and softe. So as men may mest in Inward felyng. and deplich þenkynge. sauour fynden. ... Men schal fynden lihtliche þis tretys in Cadence. After þe bigynninge. 3if hit beo riht poynted; & Rymed in sum stude. To beo more louesum. to hem þat hit reden.²⁴

The first part of this preface, as Sr Westra pointed out, is a translation of Anselm's directions to the Countess Matilda on the reading of his meditations and prayers. The second part, and in particular the reference to 'cadence', has caused a good deal of difficulty in the criticism of this work. Margery Morgan attempted to demonstrate that 'cadence' here referred specifically to the Gregorian *cursus*, a position that was refuted by Lois Smedick.²⁵ I suspect rather that the word 'cadence' here does not refer to its modern meaning of musical or metrical beat, but to the idea of *similiter cadens*: the author's intention, I believe, was to describe his work in terms of the Isidorian, rather than the Gregorian style. In these terms, the description is entirely appropriate.

Finally, we may ask whether this style is the model that Richard Rolle used in his rhythmical, alliterative prose. As so often with Rolle, the answer here is 'Yes and no'. Where the Isidorian style is particularly interested in the effect of similarly ending clauses, Rolle tends to interest himself in alliteration. Passages in his writings do indeed demonstrate a level of parallelism that would indicate an Isidorian model for at least part of his style: in an article on parallelism and pointing (punctuation) in manuscripts of his works, Smedick provided an example that compares well with those that we have seen above:²⁶

And when þou spekes til him and seys 'Jhesu', thurgh custom; it sal be in þi ere joy. in þi mouth honye . in þi hert melody . For þe sall thynk to here þat name be nevened . swetnes to speke it . myrth and sang to thynk it . If þou thynk Jhesu contynuely . and halde it stably; it purges þi syn . and kyndels þi hert.

Whether Rolle was inspired or self-taught (or both), his prose style, like his theology, appears to incorporate various models without completely following any of them.

Notes

¹ David Wallace (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 539–65 (p. 539).

² Owen Chadwick, review of *The Materials, Sources and Methods of Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Derek Baker, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 27 (1976), 303–7 (p. 303).

- ³ *A Leaf from the Great Tree of God: Essays in Honour of Ritamary Bradley, SFCC*, ed. Margot H. King (Toronto: Peregrina Publishing Co., 1994); *Showings of Love: Extant Texts and Translation*, ed. Sr Anna Maria Reynolds, CP and Julia Bolton Holloway, Biblioteche e Archivi 8 (SISMEL: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2001).
- ⁴ Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London: Routledge, 1993); Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).
- ⁵ First noted by Anne Hudson, 'Lollardy: the English heresy?', *Studies in Church History*, 18 (1982), 261–83; *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 437–40.
- ⁶ Nicolas Watson, 'Censorship and cultural change in late-medieval England: vernacular theology, the Oxford translation debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409', *Speculum*, 70 (1995), 822–64.
- ⁷ I have given an outline discussion the first two of these modes in Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2005), pp. intro1–intro 7.
- ⁸ In fact, such writings often have a double audience: the women, religious or lay, Latinate or not, to whom they were directed, and a separate intentional audience of other men, almost invariably clerical and Latinate, before whom the writer was performing. It was thus, in large part, a literature written by men for women for men.
- ⁹ *Parisiana Poetria*, ed. Traugott Lawlor (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 106–9. Citations in the following discussion are from this edition; translations are my own, but based in part on Lawlor's. The passage on the four curial styles is also to be found in a fifteenth-century version of the *Summa* of Bernard de Meung (c.1200) in Bodleian MS Douce 52, whence it was described by Noel Denholme-Young as extracted and expanded by John of Garland; this attribution is repeated in Lawlor, pp. 256–7. In fact, I am informed by Charles Vulliez, who is working on the textual tradition of the various versions of the *Ars Dictandi* of Bernard de Meung, that this passage is only to be found in the Oxford manuscript, and was in all probability borrowed from John of Garland.
- ¹⁰ 'In stilo Ysydoriano, quo utitur Augustinus in libro Soliloquiorum, distinguntur clausulae similem habentes finem secundum leoninitatem et consonanciam; et uidentur esse clausulae pares in sillabis quamuis non sint. Item iste stilus ualde motuius est ad pietatem uel ad leticiam.' See also J. Fontaine, 'Théorie et pratique du style chez Isidore de Séville', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 14 (1960), 65–101.
- ¹¹ In places where the word-order of the Latin would be unintelligible in English, I have repeated the necessary word, in square brackets, both where it makes sense in English and where it actually occurs in the Latin text. All translations from Latin works are my own unless otherwise stated.
- ¹² Stirnimann, 'Zu Augustinus' Soliloquia I, 1,2–6', in *Abendländische Mystik im Mittelalter: Symposion Kloster Engelberg 1984*, ed. Kurt Ruh (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlags-Buchhandlung, 1986), pp. 162–76.

- ¹³ Another example: the phrases of the blessing 'In nomine Patris / et Filii / et Spiritus Sancti' are *similiter cadentes*, because all are masculine singular genitives – but only the second and third rhyme.
- ¹⁴ PL 83, cols. 827–9.
- ¹⁵ Bestul, 'Devotional writing in England between Anselm and Richard Rolle', in *Mysticism Medieval and Modern*, ed. Valerie M. Lagorio, Salzburg Studies in English Literature: Elizabethan and Renaissance Studies, 92:20 (Salzburg, 1986), pp. 12–28.
- ¹⁶ Anselm, *Opera Omnia*, ed. F. S. Schmidt (Stuttgart: Friedrich Fromman, 1968), vol. 2, p. 3: 'Orationes sive meditationes quae subscripti sunt, quoniam ad excitandum legentis mentem ad dei amorem vel timorem, sed ad suimet discussionem editae sunt, non sunt legendae in tumultu, sed in quiete, nec cursim et velociter, sed paulatim cum intenta et morosa meditatione. Nec debet intendere lector ut quamlibet earum totam perleget, sed quantum sentit sibi deo adiuvante valere ad accendendum affectum orandi, vel quantum illum delectat.' See also Sr Benedicta Ward, *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm, with the Proslogion* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 89.
- ¹⁷ Anselm of Canterbury, 'Meditatio II. Deploratio Virginitatis Male Amissae', S. Anselmi, *Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*, vol. 3, ed. Franciscus Salesius Schmitt (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1946), p. 80.
- ¹⁸ W. Vollhardt, *Einfluss der lateinischen geistlichen Litteratur auf einige kleinere Schöpfungen der englischen Uebergangsperiode* (diss. Leipzig, 1888), cited in Sr M. Salvina Westra (ed.), *A Talkyng of þe Love of God, edited from MS. Vernon (Bodleian 3938) and collated with MS Simeon (Brit. Mus. Add. 22283), with Introduction, Notes, Phonology, Grammar, Glossary and other apparatus* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950), p. xxi.
- ¹⁹ *þe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, EETS os 241, ed. W. Meredith Thompson (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. xxvi.
- ²⁰ *þe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, ll. 1–10.
- ²¹ Savage and Watson, pp. 247–8.
- ²² Cited in Westra (ed.), pp. xxi.
- ²³ *A Talkyng of the Loue of God*, 14/21–6.
- ²⁴ *A Talkyng of the Loue of God*, 2/1–5, 16–19.
- ²⁵ Morgan, 'A Talkyng of the Love of God and the continuity of stylistic tradition in Middle English prose meditations', *Review of English Studies*, ns 3 (1953), 97–116; 'A treatise in cadence', *Modern Languages Review*, 47 (1952), 156–64; Smedick, 'Cursus in Middle English: A Talking of the Love of God reconsidered', *Mediaeval Studies*, 37 (1975), 387–406.
- ²⁶ From *The Form of Living*, cited in Smedick, 'Parallelism and pointing in Rolle's rhythmical style', *Mediaeval Studies*, 41 (1979), 461–2.

Afterword: 'On Eise'

NICHOLAS WATSON

This book offers a rich collection of studies of a group of texts that are themselves unexpectedly rich but that have sometimes seemed, like much affective and meditative writing, resistant to the kind of detailed scholarly analysis they benefit from here. The unexpectedness arises partly from the fact that the works represent a mode of piety often associated, so far as vernacular texts are concerned, with continental religiosity or with the laicized devotions of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but which these texts show to have been fully alive in the first half of the English thirteenth century. *Ancrene Wisse* and St Katherine's prayers to 'sweet soft Jesus' in *Seinte Katerine* give us early glimpses of this mode of piety, with its emphasis on the three least abstract and most intimate senses – touch, taste and smell – and reluctance to insist on an ancient distinction between the physical and spiritual senses still partly in place in this piety's most influential source, Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermones super Cantici Canticorum*. There are further examples of the mode in thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman, including versions of the great Anglo-Latin hymn 'Dulcis Ihesu Memoria'; spectacular and often bafflingly complicated instances in Anglo-Latin; and intriguing equivalents in the beguine and convent spirituality of the Low Countries.¹ Around 1260, Philip of Clairvaux, one of Bernard's successors as abbot of the Cistercian mother-house, watched Elizabeth of Spalbeek, risen from bed to perform her version of what he took to be the liturgical office, murmur "'Zouche here! Zouche heere!" that is to say in Englysche, "Swete Loord, swete Lord", as she gazed at 'a tabil ful wele depeynte with an ymage of oure Lorde crucifyed' whilst enacting the stations of Christ's Passion before his transfixed eyes.² Everywhere across Europe, as Rachel Fulton's *From Judgement to Passion* makes clear,

startling, self-consciously novel devotions like this to Christ and his mother were on the rise.³ But were it not for the *Wohunge of ure Lauerd* and its colleagues, and for one contemporary work, Thomas of Hales's *Luue-Ron*,⁴ our knowledge of early insular *Brautmystik* would be so much the poorer that we might be tempted to think the period's vernacular religiosity cut off from these wider movements, its primary orientation penitential and pastoral, its private devotions still consisting largely of the repetition of the psalms in Latin, French and English, its sole major innovation in this area the increasing use of the Latin Little Hours of the Virgin.⁵

As had been true a century and a half earlier of Goscelin's *Liber Confortatorius*, and sixty years after that of Aelred's *De Institutione Inclusarum*, thirteenth-century English anchoritic texts were not only in the spiritual vanguard – announcing themes, praxes and affects that became much more widely distributed a century later – but also, not coincidentally, impressively internationalist in spiritual orientation. For all the careful localization of the writing systems employed in copying the Wooing Group explored by Jeremy Smith (and the future possibility of a localized 'cultural mapping' of these early Middle English texts he tentatively looks forward to in closing), what is most striking about these texts from the viewpoint of intellectual history is their cultural reach. Even if the readership of these works was intended to be exclusively anchoritic, the lives of their users were apt to be less parochial than our idealized picture of the enclosed anchoress makes it easy to realize. The fraternal orders whose members – as Bella Millett has memorably taught us elsewhere⁶ – may have provided much of the formal support for the lay anchoresses addressed by the Wooing Group, as they did for groups of religious women through the Low Countries and Germany, were also strikingly internationalist. The schooling of English Dominican and Franciscan friars was most likely to take place in Oxford from about the 1230s on. But as Millett's supple argument suggests that the 'conditions of eligibility' found in *Wohunge* are a version of particular, northern French instantiation of this 'inflatable *topos*' – a memorable and pastorally useful list, designed for carrying around in the portmanteau of the individual friar-preacher's mind or notebook – this did little to interrupt a habit of intellectual borrowing from Paris on the part of English readers and theologians.

Even, to an extent, a habit of exchange. If one copy of *Ancrene Wisse*'s grandest descendant, the Anglo-Norman *Compileison*, travelled east across England to Norwich, another crossed the Channel to Paris. Much later, in the 1490s, it may have been from Paris that Caxton acquired the French compilation that included the only portions of *Ancrene Wisse* printed before

modern times, *A Tretyse of Love*.⁷ Thirteenth-century English anchoritism saw itself both as a continuation of an ancient insular eremitic tradition and as part of the acknowledged international cutting-edge of female spirituality. Dominican and Franciscan training uniquely qualified its recipients to adapt the increasingly synthetic religiosity in which they were inculcated to local conditions, thus to sustain both understandings of English anchoritism at once.⁸ Perhaps the concern with regional phonemes Smith finds in the orthography of Wooing Group manuscripts – like the more fine-grained and systematic concern shown by the Augustinian Canon Orm in early thirteenth-century Lincolnshire – was as much a sign of the new portability (Millett's good word) of theology in the hands of these centralized and activist religious orders as of the local nature of religious instruction on the ground.

If these works are, indeed, in these senses 'unexpected', it is interesting – given our collective scholarly pleasure in the unexpected, in the historical *difficilior lectio* – that the texts in the Wooing Group – unlike many of the works in the larger *Ancrene Wisse* Group, of which the Wooing Group forms a subset – have also until recently proved so resistant to serious analysis. This, the first collection to deal exclusively with the Wooing Group, comprises close to half of what has been published on the topic over a period of twenty years in which spirituality has been consistently at the forefront of medieval scholarship. Before the 1990s, little indeed had been written on the Wooing Group outside the introductions to its two editions. Even E. K. Chambers and J. R. R. Tolkien, early champions of *Ancrene Wisse*, had much less to say about the *Wohunge* and its colleagues than about the other members of the *Ancrene Wisse* Group: *Holy Maidenhood*, *Sawles Warde* and the saints' lives, *Seinte Katerine*, *Seinte Juliana* and *Seinte Margarete*. The *Wohunge*'s relative distance from the linguistic purity Tolkien attributed (erroneously, as Smith points out) to the 'AB' language he found in two *Ancrene Wisse* Group manuscripts, Bodley 34 and Cambridge, Corpus Christi 402 – and which Chambers eulogized in his heady 1932 study, *On the Continuity of English Prose* – was the ostensible cause.⁹ But Tolkien's and Chambers's interest in genealogy also involved casting the language and style of the *Ancrene Wisse* Group in masculine terms, as hallmarks of the 'country gentleman' that English had, under the Normans, become. There were echoes here both of Gerard Manley Hopkins's appeal to the masculine 'thigh and sinew' of the English language and of Carl Horstmann's association of the Germanic elements of English with masculine strength, its Romance ones with the degenerate feminine. The works are simply too focused on an articulation of an explic-

itly feminine spirituality, too rhetorically sensual and too emotive to play the dignified tweed-jacket-and-trimmed-moustache role this genealogical narrative demanded.¹⁰

Chambers, a sensitive and resourceful reader, still contrived to make some use of the Wooing Group, and its descendant, *A Talkyng of þe Love of God*, in constructing his argument for continuity between the Old English prose of Alfred and the Humanist prose of Sir Thomas More. If both he and Tolkien also betrayed embarrassment at these works, they were not alone, nor was their reaction confined to male scholars. Indeed, as translations of the *Ancrene Wisse* Group as a whole became widely accessible in the early 1990s, their increasing prominence amongst scholars of spirituality – who, puzzlingly, passed *Ancrene Wisse* and its peers by through most of the twentieth century – was at first a source of difficulty mainly to feminists. Not only did the great scholar of eremitism, Sister Benedicta Ward, write fiercely against the Wooing Group and *A Talkyng of þe Loue of God* as examples of bastardized Anselmianism.¹¹ In her influential *Early English Devotional Prose and Its Audience* of 1990, Elizabeth Robertson saw *Ancrene Wisse* and its colleagues as sustaining an explicitly patriarchal understanding of women's needs and capacities; while, in a movingly personal rodomontade published in *Vox Benedictina* in 1991, one of the founders of medieval mystical scholarship, Sister Ritamary Bradley, denounced the ascetic spirituality of the entire *Ancrene Wisse* Group, drawing it into the ideological battles over female enclosure that have featured in the history of female orders from St Clare of Assisi onwards in order to read it as an especially vicious example of ecclesiastical misogyny.¹² The Wooing Group itself was prominent only in the first of these analyses, but their collective atmosphere did not bode well for its critical reputation.

Nor (with the notable exception of Robertson's considerably more fluid analysis) did these analyses anticipate the sudden reversal of their arguments by more recent feminist scholars, who have understood both the institutional arrangements that gave anchoresses their own space and the metaphorical constructions of the anchoritic life that dominate the works written for and about them in an opposite way: as enabling, not disabling, the lives of those who embraced this distinctly female version of religious enclosure. As many of the essays in this volume attest by the explicitness of their commitment to the impassioned, embodied, thickly enculturated terms in which the Wooing Group assists anchoresses to praise, choose and honour their spiritual husband and lover, scholarly resistance to taking the Wooing Group seriously as an object of scholarly study and to the manner of living it sustained and witnesses has come to an end together.

Vituperation (not too strong a word for some of the earlier scholarship) has been abruptly replaced by celebration.

Why so? In many ways, Wooing Group scholarship has, in this, been in tune with its larger field, for celebration began to emerge as the dominant mode of scholarship on medieval women's spirituality with Caroline Walker Bynum's paradigm-shifting *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* of 1988.¹³ (The success of this book was, in turn, furthered by the fascination of Anglo-American feminist scholars during the 1990s with work on gender conducted from the 1970s on by French feminists, especially Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, whose thematizations of *écriture féminine* and abjection seemed tailor-made for medieval spirituality studies.) Excited by the wealth of long-neglected materials, and by the rich cultural resources spirituality is understood to have provided for women during the same centuries in which their institutional opportunities – by most of the measures used by modern historians – were declining, scholars have increasingly taken a cue from the emphasis on narrative, imagination and paradox in many of the relevant writings themselves, to generate remarkably positive readings of these texts and recreations of the lives of those who used them.

Thus in this volume, Susannah Chewning's discussion of the category of 'faith' as an empowering 'translational practice' for anchoresses deploys the several associations of the medieval term *translatio* to suggest that the Wooing Group provided greater autonomy for its readers than many of its vernacular successors, despite the physically and culturally constricted circumstances in which anchoresses, above all, lived. In making this perhaps paradoxical argument, Chewning makes an assumption that would have shocked an earlier feminist generation – and that still shocks students when they first encounter the *Ancrene Wisse* Group and its scholarship – but that is common to most contributors here: that the confined space of the anchoritic cell itself can (and should) be read as a place, not of containment but of empowerment, of female agency. To cite a favourite analogue in recent accounts of the anchoritic life, the anchoritic cell was a kind of medieval prefiguration of Virginia Woolf's *Room of One's Own*.¹⁴ Laying salutary emphasis on a passage of *Ancrene Wisse* which few scholars have taken seriously, Chewning reminds us that this understanding of the cell had an institutional grounding in the high status attributed to the anchoritic life itself, constituting those who chose it as metaphorical 'anchors', guarantors of the orthodoxy of the (local and universal) Church.

Innes-Parker also treats the cell as a place of female empowerment, although she shares with other contributors, most forcibly Anne Savage, an understanding of this empowerment as relative, not absolute, and of the

cell, less as a locus of a certain institutional status (as Chewing would have it) than as a refuge from the institutional, including the institution of the convent. (Although her focus is the convent, not the cell, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne's *Saints' Lives and the Literary Culture of Women* offers a rich, historical meditation on the many ways in which both these readings of female enclosure might be true at once).¹⁵ Yet in the two anchoritic careers on which her ambitious study focuses, Innes-Parker shows that the cell, however comforting a space, was no more separate from the world than were its denizens. Scholars of *Ancrene Wisse* have often taken the work's first readers for granted, as virginal *tabulae rasae*, and understood the cell, not simply as a refuge, but as a refuge for the innocent – in the worst case, for diaphanous medieval maidens terrified of life, modelled on Blake's Thel or a painting by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Innes-Parker's exemplary historical anchoresses enter the cell and there (suppositiously) encounter the Wooing Group as middle-aged widows of independent means and real autonomy of action. Far from being bullied into compliant virginity by the 'choice of husband' *topoi* of the *Wohunge*, these women thus invest their use of the work with their personal, including their sexual, experience.

Did the choice of Jesus and the cell, not a new earthly husband and the castle, made by anchoresses like Annora and Loretta de Braose represent the fruit of grim knowledge of the conditions under which secular society, and marriage, necessarily operated? Or can we read the language in which the *Wohunge* has anchoresses espouse their heavenly lord in the opposite way, as signs of continuity, not disjunction, between the worlds outside and inside the cell? Were the de Braoses lovingly commemorating or were they recovering from their earlier marriages, when they (or others like them) responded to the *Wohunge*'s encouragements to incorporate the language of high-born courtship, romantic and hard-headed by turns, into their enclosed and intensified spiritual lives? To what extent is the anchoritic life really a *repudiation* of the world? It is a feature of the generic nature of the exercise embodied by the *Wohunge* to which Bella Millett draws our attention – the manner in which any user of the text would have been aware of working through a particular reiteration of a *topos* – that such questions can have no general answers. One of the ways in which meditations like the *Wohunge* construct themselves differently from other kinds of literary work, rhetorical, poetic or dramatic, is that they represent themselves as 'portable' – usable in different ways in differing situations – for their readers, not only their writers. The Wooing Group consists of a series of strictly *voluntary* spiritual exercises, non-liturgical in nature, designed to occupy the part of

the anchoritic life dedicated to spiritual *otium* ('eise' as *Wohunge* puts it in closing), and requiring for their effectiveness the infusion of the different life experiences of their users, even as they contribute to the formation of new experiences. The 'I' of medieval meditation is not the 'I' of a poet or dramatic character but of the reader: a reader who is in some sense remade by her reading but who is also assumed to retain an unpredictable and individual response to it, the more so if the meditation constantly references that variable thing, worldly experience. Innes-Parker is right to insist on the extent to which the *Wohunge* and its colleagues represent places of exchange between *topoi* like the 'conditions of eligibility', unpacked into a certain literary format for a local occasion by the Group's well-educated and travelled authors, but retaining much of their latency of meaning as they await instantiation (through *use*) in the lives of often well-educated and travelled readers.

It is this aspect of the *Wohunge* and its colleagues, as meditative texts which at once generate experience and presuppose or await it, that most interests the majority of contributors to this book and that perhaps also most demands the empathetic and celebratory treatment the texts here receive. Such treatment is partly merited because the ongoing project of reclaiming women's history demands a respectful approach both to its surviving materials and to the life choices of historical women: not least because a hermeneutics of empathy provides the best route to an initial understanding of any culturally distant materials, as cultural and linguistic anthropologists have repeatedly stressed, and as Bynum's work so well demonstrates.¹⁶ Outside spirituality studies, explicitly empathetic reading of individual texts was in relative disfavour until recently amongst Middle English scholars whose work, through the 1990s, was energized by New Historicism, with its use of deconstructive reading practices and Foucauldian analyses of texts and their contexts as cultural discourses whose implied theme was always the circulation of power. Yet as Christopher Cannon has remarked in another context, how can literary medievalists successfully come to terms with the shocking series of unique formal objects that is Middle English literature in general, unless by exploring these objects from the inside, refusing the deconstructive move? In particular, affective works like the Wooing Group, works that at once celebrate experience and wait to be completed by experience – works whose expressive, rhapsodic forms seem to cross and recross the boundary between text and experience – cannot properly be read except in a mode that includes the affective, that takes up the challenge of the Group's latency of feeling and meaning.¹⁷

No fewer than five of the nine essays gathered here – those by Jennifer N. Brown, Sarah Salih, Michael Sargent, Michelle Sauer and Anne Savage – in different ways invite us to encounter the Wooing Group or its descendant, *A Talkyng of þe Loue of God*, somatically: that is, as texts whose meanings reside in their bodily as much as their mental effects on readers: or rather, that disallow the very distinction between bodily and mental effects, as they do the distinctions between text and reader, reader and writer, even meditator and meditative subject (or anchoress and Christ). Michael Sargent's account of *A Talkyng* puts this invitation in rhetorical terms, showing that the rhythmic and sonic doubling of clauses so notable in this work, but also so pronounced a feature of Anselmian meditation in general, is an experiment in the Isidorian mode of prose, with the special power that mode has, according to John of Garland, 'to stir piety', to generate affect. Outlining a valuable typology of the genres and types of what he calls 'vernacular spirituality', Sargent suggests that we call manifestations of the Isidorian mode in devotional texts 'mystagogic' and describes this non-hortatory mode as aimed at producing in the reader 'an experience similar to that of the writer'.

In the case of the carefully anonymous, depersonalized meditations such as *A Talkyng* and the *Wohunge* – so different in their voicing from Anselm's meditative soliloquies, in which the reader is indeed united with the voice of a specific, powerfully individuated figure – it may be as true to say, as does Jennifer Brown, that the reader's union is less with the writer than the text: that is, both the physical experience *of* and the imaginative experience *in* the text. In her account of the repetitive structure of the *Wohunge*, a structure designed to be remembered by readers as well as writers – internalized, digested and ruminated, not merely made available for recall – Brown invokes the non-medieval and non-Western but evocative term 'mantra' to designate a mode of prayer in which subject and object become experientially, as well as verbally, confused and mutually infused in a verbal equivalent of mystical union. Because the *Wohunge* is not only a prayer but a narration of Christ's Passion, this union is multiple, perhaps progressive, beginning with the union between the reader and the Isidorian text that takes place whenever the text is intensively performed, then moving on to the modes of union with Christ imagined or enacted within the text. It is a measure of the close relation that persists between the Wooing Group and the liturgy – the formal, Latin prayers which absorbed a great deal of the anchoritic day – that it seldom occurs to these works to disturb the implied equation of textual and mystical union by differentiating this textual Christ from the transcendent Christ he represents. In Richard Rolle's stormily

performative *Passion Meditations* (much indebted to James of Milan's *Stimulus Amoris*), the meditator is given words in which to confess her inability to experience the meditation properly, by uniting with the words she is mouthing and the scenes they describe: 'Whe! Lord, a drope of þi blod to droppe on my soule in mynde of þi passyoun may hele al my sore, soule and softe in þi grace it þat is so hard, and so dyen whan þi wyll is.'¹⁸ Christ here is *beyond* the text, not within it; one drop of his blood, one moment of true concentration – of successful inner realization of the feelings the text performs – might heal the reader, might act as saving grace itself. The Wooing Group and *A Talkyng* work in a different way, as befits both the difference in their underlying assumptions about the spiritual life and their literary styles. Their rhythms and structures exist to interact with the reader, to provide a recurring emotional context for the physical state that is her spiritual journey, not to catapult her elsewhere.

My extrapolation from Brown's use of the term 'mantra' here owes something to Anne Savage's argument that Wooing Group texts can be understood in strictly somatic terms, as performing a vital physiological function for their users, arousing emotions and satisfying bodily and psychic needs together. On the one hand, this process is generated by the moment-by-moment use of the texts themselves, as in Sargent and Brown's accounts. Savage draws attention to the frequent use of the *punctus* in all copies of the Wooing Group works. These are evidence, not simply of rhetorical and memorial structures but of how users voiced the works, that is, controlled articulation and breathing as a means of generative interaction with the words in front of them. In the prologue to *A Talkyng*, quoted by Sargent, pointing is explicitly described as a guide to cadence, that is, voicing. On the other hand, these words imply a narrative with more general implications, situating the radically separated anchoress within a heroic romance plot – the 'anchoritic cycle' which Savage suggests unites all the *Ancrene Wisse* Group works – in which the imaginative structures needed to sustain anchoritic selfhood are made internal, as natural to the self as breathing or vocalizing themselves. This use of what are clearly meant to be pleasurable literary works, works designed to give 'eise' to the intensity of the anchoritic day, has the fundamentally practical aim of recuperating or substituting for the suffering and isolation that is part and parcel of anchoritic existence, and doing so in terms that notionally belong to the realm of the transcendent but in practice constantly reactivate the bodily. Romance here, a genre whose locus in the self is the imagination, operates (like the imagination itself in medieval accounts of the faculty) as a bridge between body and soul, immanent and transcendent.

Moreover, this is a bridge regularly crossed in both directions, as the 'higher life' of the anchoress's engagement with Christ's Passion becomes the place in which Christ's bodily pain is experienced through meditation, even as this induced pain substitutes, transferentially, for the material sufferings of her daily existence.

Savage implicitly reads the Wooing Group through a therapeutic model of the spiritual exercise: a model whose roots lie in ancient Greco-Roman philosophy, with its deployment of the language of remedy, healing and what Martha Nussbaum has called 'human flourishing', and frequent recourse to the category of experience and the demands of the entirety of the human self.¹⁹ To this extent, her account has much in common with Michelle Sauer's richly researched rumination on the metaphors of blood in the Wooing Group, a rumination which focuses our attention on both the healing and the purifying qualities of the Group's blood piety. Sauer means quite specific things by healing ('reparation' is her term) and purifying, understanding Christ's blood as the *Wohunge* displays it for us as a 'stand-in' for anchoritic blood: the blood that might at any time flow from the body of the raped anchoress; the polluting menstrual blood that did flow, dangerously close to the sacred space of the church and its consecrated elements. In other words, in this view it was Christ's blood that alone allowed anchoresses to be anchoresses, always available in their highly public semi-solitude for physical rape (as *Ancrene Wisse* forcefully notices in the early prominence it gives to the figure of Dinah), their menses constantly betraying the legacy of Eve (another biblical woman often referred to in *Ancrene Wisse*), yet still bearers, in their bodies, of the idea of the sacred.

But where, for Savage, the site of therapy remains the body, for Sauer the emphasis of the Wooing Group resides precisely in the transcendence attributed to Christ's blood. Noting the influence of the *topoi* of the Charter of Christ and the 'exchange of hearts' on passages of *Wohunge* and *Ureisun*, *topoi* which both enact notionally objective exchanges between Christ and the sinner, or between lover and lover, Sauer is clear that the transcendent Christ is here the dominant party, the hero (in Savage's terms) of his own romance. In some ways, the texts of the Wooing Group present us with a feminized, in certain passages even a passive Christ, a Christ who (as Sauer says) *must* bleed and be made available for penetration in order to make identification with him possible to women readers, in order that he be useful. But the danger she sees in the cultural construction of women's blood as vulnerable and polluting (a view of menses she interestingly assumes anchoresses would have shared) is such that, in her account, the

blood of the anchoress must imaginatively disappear, be replaced by, rather than (say) be transubstantiated into, the blood of Christ.

Put formulaically, an anchoress is thus an otherwise sexually vulnerable and polluting woman whose symbolic penetration of Christ's body has caused her blood to be replaced by that of Christ. This formulation refuses to imagine anchoritic blood as in any way sacralized – while this blood is transfused into Christ's body as part of the exchange of hearts, this process serves only to neutralize it – and gives a startlingly physical implication to the Pauline 'it is not I but Christ who lives in me' (Gal. 2:20), quoted near the end of *Ureison* and *Lofsong*. Still more startling is what this formulation does to the idea of the therapeutic, for what requires healing ('reparation') in this model is not suffering but rather the anchoress's physical femininity itself. If Innes-Parker deals one kind of blow to our understanding of the *topos* of virginal purity in Ancrene Wisse Group texts, Sauer deals another, by reminding us of the strangeness of medieval constructions of the female body: in particular, of how medieval notions of pollution encompassed all the body's fluids, including not only those released in intercourse but menstrual blood. The advances in our understanding of medieval virginity over the last fifteen years have encouraged us to see virginity, first and foremost, as a high-status professional identity, malleable enough to allow, for example, Innes-Parker's widowed anchoresses (even, in some accounts, a married woman like Margery Kempe) to reconstitute their virginal status.²⁰ If our grasp of the female physicality referenced by the term 'virgin' has sometimes failed in the process – if the discourse of virginity has been treated as *decorporealizing* the female body – Sauer brings us back to this body. In her account of the 'blood swap', even anchoresses, their virginal treasure locked in the fragile vessel of their bodies (2 Cor. 4:7) – their bodies and souls united with Christ in a union of Bride and Bridegroom which, for thirteenth-century Christians, was far more than a metaphor – constantly require the purifying transfusions of the blood of Christ.

For all this, female anchoritic spirituality retained its prestige, and did so in part precisely because of its somatic quality: because of the way the term 'spouse of Christ' united a high-status professional identity (wife of a great lord) with a sexually and narratively charged identity (bedmate of a great lord), the social responsibilities of the married woman with the physical pleasures of the mistress. After all, in the title *þe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, who is wooing whom? If anchoress and Christ are already wedded, why does courtship continue? In romances such as the *Lais* of Marie de France, it is the mistress, not the wife, who continues to experience the excitement of courtship even when her status as mistress has solidified, and who

can court as well as be courted. *Wohunge* picks up the motif of romantic adultery explicitly when the meditator imagines choosing Christ for his aristocratic lineage, remarking provocatively that the rich and noble 'ofte winnen luue lihtliche cheape . for ofte moni wummon letes hire mensket' to such men, but then turning this *pastourelle* scenario immediately on its head by reminding us that, in this meditation, it is the relatively low-born anchoress who is doing the choosing: 'up o hwat herre mon mai i mi luue sette . hwer mai i gentiller mon chese þen þe?'²¹ Perhaps in recognition that their death to the world, their entry into a heavenly relationship with the bridegroom while still in this life, is imputed, not realized, anchoresses remain figures of romantic desire, longing for their lord even as, in principle, they already possess him.

Also, as Sarah Salih suggests in her exploration of the 'transvestite' possibilities of anchoritic identity, perhaps figures *for* desire. Bringing to bear a critique of the heteronormative assumptions of historicist work on pre-modern devotion first developed by Richard Rambuss, Karma Lochrie and others, Salih argues that the men who likely authored the Wooing Group may not have regarded the anchorhold as 'an exclusively female space' but may also have treated it as 'a repository for the excess of clerical affects': that is, as sites on to which their self-identification with the role of the *sponsa Christi* might be projected. In this model, the authors of the Wooing Group are neither the preachers and pastoral theologians they are for Millett, nor the embarrassment to readings of the Wooing Group as 'exclusively female' she rightly suggests they are in a good deal of scholarship, but colleagues of their anchoritic charges, who share with them their pleasure of 'choosing' Christ for all his masculine traits, as users both of the texts and of the female subject positions they adopt.

This is an attractive possibility, not least because it reminds us that the fraternal orders were initially associated with an extraordinary atmosphere of spiritual excitement in which social, sexual and other categories did seem to be swept away, and in which men and women might, temporarily and imaginatively, exchange roles. Our best evidence for this excitement is, perhaps, Salimbene's account of what G. G. Coulton calls the 'Great Alleluia' of 1233, but early thirteenth-century texts written in England, from Adam of Exeter's commentary on the Pater Noster to Robert Grosseteste's *Chastel d'Amour*, provide their own kind of evidence for the inclusiveness of thought and imagery that was possible at this cultural moment, as well as offering ample opportunities for queer reading.²² Yet as Salih notes, the difficulties involved in such a reading of the Wooing Group are not only the product of lingering heteronormative thinking but also a

matter of evidence, since the official thinking of friars on the topic of pastoral responsibility was from the start more concerned with the discharging of a pedagogical duty than with the sharing of a spiritual bond. When desire does get mentioned in accounts of pastoral relationships between men and women – for example, in *Vitae* of holy women written by their spiritual directors – the focus is on the desire generated *between* the two, their holy zeal (or, when things go wrong, sexual desire) for one another, not on the possibilities for spiritual transgenering. That is, our sources do not seem much interested in elaborating on the ways in which male religious projected their own spiritual desires onto their ministry to religious women. Whether or not this absence is itself a trace of the queer remains, I think, to be shown.

Nonetheless, we do well to remember that the writers of the Wooing Group, like its readers, will have come to their task with varied personal agendas, as we do well to remember that these educated (it seems) friars of international outlook, whose institutional language was Latin and whose communications with one another were in Latin or French, were also local boys drawing on their intimate knowledge of a specific dialect of English: a knowledge which, in and of itself, implies a certain cultural, even familial, closeness to their readers. More concretely, as Salih points out, in considering the *Ancrene Wisse* Group works as works written for, and in intimate relation to, women, our readings of the politics of sex and gender within the works needs to take into account the known manuscript and textual history of the works themselves, their movement into the hands of religious men and male and female members of the laity, and, especially in the case of *A Talkyng*, their partial appropriation for a male or mixed readership. Like other members of the semi-religious devout, anchoresses, through the literature written for them, provided one of the great conduits of religious thought from monastic into lay milieux during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. As early as the *Compileisun*, written only a generation after *Ancrene Wisse*, the strong tendency of pastoral thinking to universalize its address – not to mention the habit of pastoralia produced by the fraternal orders to say ‘we’, rather than ‘you’, generalizing didacticism into first-person plural form – incorporated *Ancrene Wisse* into a work of the widest appeal, addressing its readers and hearers as the ‘freres et sueurs’, the ‘beau tresdouz amiz’ of the author-preacher.²³ In using the work in this way, while suppressing very little of its erotic content, the *Compileisun* shows how natural it was in certain contexts, penitential as well as erotic, to think of the female subject-position as normative, to extrapolate from ‘holy woman’ to ‘all women and men’. If we define the queer broadly, as incorporating all

kinds of cross-gendered role-play, there is a sense in which medieval vernacular religiosity as a whole, perhaps the very category of the subordinated, notionally passive 'lay' Christian, was hence inherently a negotiation with the queer, a transvestite project.

Where will the next ten years take Wooing Group scholarship? As historical scholarship continues to absorb the implications of Bella Millett's stunning argument for the Dominican origins of *Ancrene Wisse*, and the consequent pulling of all *Ancrene Wisse* Group texts towards the ambit of the fraternal orders, we are sure to see a further internationalization of studies in the field, the application of a widening series of continental contexts and analogues within which to explore the *Wohunge* and its colleagues. Given the insularity of so much work on English religiosity, this development is much to be desired. Conversely, as the study of the multilingual culture of twelfth- and thirteenth-century England proceeds, our perception of the relevance of Anglo-Latin, Anglo-Norman and late Old English contexts for the Wooing Group is unlikely to lag. Not only does the forthcoming publication of *Anglo-Norman Piety* promise clear and immediate insights. Elaine Traherne's ongoing analyses of the copying of Old English texts through the twelfth century may well offer a new set of possibilities for thinking about the local nature of thirteenth-century English spiritual instruction, and may require us to think of the eleventh-century Benedictine Reform as, in its way, as important a context as the Fourth Lateran Council for the entire *Ancrene Wisse* Group.²⁴

Combined with a further study of sources, a revival of stylistic analyses of the Wooing Group may also generate a more nuanced understanding of the works' Latin literary affiliations, liturgical and otherwise. Given both the influence of early litanies and other prayer forms in the shorter works of the Wooing Group (especially *On Lofsong of ure Louerde*) and these works' status as private, vernacular prayers, designed to be said voluntarily during breaks in the liturgical day, we would do well in particular to develop a clearer sense of what, stylistically and thematically, makes these particular prayers distinctive, and how they are likely to have functioned within their liturgical settings. Further work on the somatic features of the prayers – as this work comes into more intimate contact with the research on affect and cognition taking place within spirituality studies – might thus be enabled to draw the somatic nature of all liturgical celebration into its ambit.

Reciting the liturgy was hard physical work, involving bowing, genuflection, occasional prostration, prolonged kneeling and standing, crossing oneself, beating of the breast, raising of the hands on high, and similar ges-

tures, all made while reciting lengthy and complex Latin texts, often in the middle of the night, on an empty stomach, and for anchoresses, in semi-solitude. Even if the *Wohunge* does gesture towards dramatization, saying the prayers of the Wooing Group was easy by comparison. Properly so, since these are works designed for 'eise': for those long afternoons between Nones and Evensong in relation to which the Benedictine Rule issues its warnings against the dangers of *otiositas*, or the occasional holidays from ritual that came when anchoresses were ill or had let blood. This fact accords well with the clear affinities between the Wooing Group and the genres of romance and erotic (religious and secular) lyric, which also belong to the hours of (lay or monastic) leisure, to the realm of play, not work. But it also points to a further possible implication of that association: that we should be wary of assuming that the Wooing Group, or the portrait of anchoritic selfhood it draws, was necessarily central to the theory or practice of thirteenth-century English anchoritism at all, or that it embodied the only self-understanding available to anchoresses.

The Wooing Group is a body of *literature*, a series of imaginative texts defined – as literary writing generally is defined – precisely by the fact that they are unnecessary: useful, pleasurable, in the case of *Wohunge* sometimes very funny, as well as urgent and powerfully moving, but not designed to be authoritative or definitive of the way of life they portray. The generally well-born women who entered anchoritic cells, many of them well on in life, had other religious reading available to them too; indeed, much of the wealth of Anglo-Norman religious writing – bibles, world histories, saints' lives, theological compendia, and more – was designed for such women. In thinking forward about these works, we should not restrict our sense of anchoritic identity to the motif of the *sponsa Christi* they so brilliantly expound or read them in isolation from the range of other devout works. As is increasingly widely recognized, the works of the Ancrene Wisse Group found multiple audiences, male as well as female, monastic as well as anchoritic, lay as well as religious. This is partly because the anchoresses for whom these works were written were likewise already part of the wider religious community, their spiritual and cultural identities equally multiple.

Notes

¹ See Ruth J. Dean, *Anglo-Norman Literature: A Guide to Texts and Manuscripts*, written with the collaboration of Maureen B. M. Bolton (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1999), pp. 392–491; the forthcoming volume *Anglo-Norman Piety*,

- ed. Tony Hunt et al.; A. G. Rigg, *A History of Anglo-Latin Literature, 1066–1422* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), especially on Walter of Wimborne and John of Hoveden; the ongoing series of volumes of vitae of Low Countries holy women published by Brepols as part of the series *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts*, e.g., *Mary of Oignies: Mother of Salvation*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, trans. Margot H. King and Hugh Feiss, *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts*, 7 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006).
- ² *The Life of Elizabeth of Spalbeek*, in Jennifer N. Brown, *Three Women of Liège: A Critical Edition of the Middle English Lives of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, Christina Mirabilis, and Marie d'Oignies, with Three Essays of Commentary*, *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts*, 23 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008).
 - ³ Rachel Fulton, *From Judgement to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800–1200* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).
 - ⁴ In *English Lyrics of the Thirteenth Century*, ed. Carleton Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932); for a study, see Thomas Hahn, 'Early Middle English', in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 61–91.
 - ⁵ Bella Millett, 'Ancrene Wisse and the Book of Hours', in *Writing Religious Women: Female Spiritual and Textual Practices in Late Medieval England*, ed. Denis Renevey and Christiania Whitehead (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), pp. 21–42.
 - ⁶ Bella Millett, 'The origins of *Ancrene Wisse*: new answers, new questions', *Medium Aevum*, 61 (1992), 206–28.
 - ⁷ For the *Compileison*, see Nicholas Watson and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'The French of England: the *Compileison*, *Ancrene Wisse*, and the idea of Anglo-Norman', *Journal of Romance Studies*, 4 (2004), 35–59. For the peregrinations of *Ancrene Wisse* texts in general, see Bella Millett, *Ancrene Wisse, the Katherine Group, and the Wooing Group*, *Annotated Bibliographies of Old and Middle English Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), pp. 49–61.
 - ⁸ A point made particularly clearly in Claire M. Waters, *Angels and Earthly Creatures: Preaching, Performance, and Gender in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), chapter 3.
 - ⁹ J. R. R. Tolkien, '*Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meïðhad*', *Essays and Studies*, 14 (1929), 104–26; Chambers, R. W., *On the Continuity of English Prose from Alfred to More and His School*, EETS os 191A (London: Oxford University Press, 1932, 1957); first published 1932.
 - ¹⁰ See Watson and Wogan-Browne, 'French of England'.
 - ¹¹ Benedicta Ward, '"Inward feeling and deeply thinking": the prayers and meditations of St Anselm revisited', *Anselm Studies*, 1 (1983), 177–84.
 - ¹² Elizabeth Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose and the Female Audience* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990); Ritamary Bradley, 'In the jaws of the bear: journeys of transformation by women mystics', *Vox Benedictina*, 8 (1991), 549–79.
 - ¹³ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

- ¹⁴ A serious joke first made by Elizabeth Robertson in the title of her 'An anchorhold of her own: female anchoritic literature in thirteenth-century England', in *Equal in God's Image: Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Julia Bolton Holloway et al. (New York: Lang, 1990), pp. 170–83. Virginia Woolf references of this kind abound in more recent literature on anchoresses.
- ¹⁵ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and the Literary Culture of Women, c.1150–1300: Virginity and Its Authorizations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).
- ¹⁶ On Bynum and anthropology, see Nicholas Watson, 'Desire for the past', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 21 (1999), 21–57, which also makes extensive use of a book by Karl Morrison: *'I Am You': The Hermeneutics of Empathy in Western Literature, Theology, and Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). The role of empathy in anthropological studies has been controversial, discussion of the topic often invoking a useful distinction between 'etic' and 'emic' analysis, where 'etic' (from 'phonetic') implies a top-down, structural approach, and 'emic' (from 'phonemic') implies a bottom-up, localized one. For this distinction, see Kenneth Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of Structure of Human Behaviour* (The Hague: Mouton, 1967).
- ¹⁷ Christopher Cannon, 'Form', in *Middle English*, ed. Paul Strohm, Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature, 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 177–90. Most pertinently, see also Cannon's *The Grounds of English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- ¹⁸ *Meditations on the Passion*, in *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle, an English Father of the Church*, ed. Carl Horstmann (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999), I.90 (first published 1895–6).
- ¹⁹ Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
- ²⁰ See, e.g., Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives; Medieval Virginites*, ed. Ruth Evans et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).
- ²¹ *De Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, EETS os 241, ed. W. Meredith Thompson (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 160–8 (often win their love pretty cheap, for there's many a woman who loses her honour/what grander man could I set my love upon, where could I choose a more nobly born man than you are?).
- ²² G. G. Coulton, *From St Francis to Dante: Translations from the Chronicle of the Franciscan Salimbene (1221–88)* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972) (first published 1907). For Grosseteste and Adam of Exeter, see Dean, *Anglo-Norman Literature*, §622 and §846; also *Anglo-Norman Piety*, ed. Hunt et al.
- ²³ See examples in Watson and Wogan-Browne, 'French of England'.
- ²⁴ *Anglo-Norman Piety*, ed. Hunt et al. For the work of Traherne and others on late Old English, see the (frequently updated) site: *The Production and use of English Manuscripts 1060–1220* (<http://www.le.ac.uk/ee/em1060to1220/index.htm>).

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- MS Royal 17 A: contains a fragment of the *Lofsong of ure Lefdi* and *þe Oreison of Seinte Marie*.
- MS. Cotton Titus D. xviii: contains some excerpts from *Ancrene Wisse* and *þe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*.

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